

THE DISNEY PRINCESS PHENOMENON

A FEMINIST ANALYSIS

ROBYN MUIR



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To my Mama, Alison, who always tells me to
dream big

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Introduction: Once Upon a Time

There is change here, because in the end, we are changed by what we see, just as we are changed when we are seen.

ITV 2019

Growing up, I always wanted to be a Disney Princess. My mother introduced me to them when I was just a few months old, and as each princess film was released, the more infatuated I became. When I asked her what I liked so much about them, she told me that the princesses created a fantasy that I could escape to, I loved the colours on the screen, and as I got older, I loved the songs and the dresses. I could dress up to be Snow White, Cinderella, Aurora, Belle, and Jasmine when I was younger. One of my earliest memories of wanting to become a Disney Princess was when I was four. I used to dream that a horse drawn pumpkin carriage would arrive and take me to my prince, just like Cinderella. When I was six, I wanted to be a mermaid like Ariel. When I was eight, I would paint with all the colours of the wind, like Pocahontas. I was completely lost in the princess world, I had the dresses, the tiaras, the shoes, everything I needed to emulate my heroines. My mother told me that as Cinderella, I would dress up and pretend to go to the ball, as Jasmine I would pretend my favourite teddy was Rajah the tiger, and as Belle I would pretend to be studious and read books. The princesses enabled me to develop my imagination and be a different person in a different world. This experience is echoed by Emily [Zemler \(2022\)](#) who wrote *Disney Princess: Beyond the Tiara*, a book sanctioned by Disney. She explains:

As I began to pay more attention, I saw the influence of the Disney Princesses everywhere. They have impacted our experiences at the Disney Parks and Resorts, the toys we play with, how we dress for big events, and how we communicate with each other on the Internet. Their influence is greater than any living celebrity, not only because they've endured for so many decades, but because they continue to grow and change along with us. And a Disney Princess is so much more than a character on a screen. As she moves out into the world,

embraced by people of all ages, backgrounds, and genders, she becomes an icon. (11)

I didn't get to meet a Disney Princess until I was 19, it was Cinderella, my childhood favourite. I was so overcome with seeing her in 'real life', I cried with nostalgia. It was at this point that I realized how important the Disney Princesses had been to my childhood. As narrated by Trevor McDonald of [ITV \(2019\)](#), "we are changed by what we see, just as we are changed when we are seen". The Disney Princesses were my role models from a young age, and I could see the same journey happening with my young family members.

Months later, *Frozen* (2013) was released in cinemas. The story of Anna and Elsa fascinated me, it was so different: complex heroines, with difficult relationships and a completely different 'happy ending'. Although I had already decided to focus my final year undergraduate dissertation on something else, I couldn't ignore the princesses. I kept thinking about how they had changed over time, and how significant that could be for the people who consumed them, and the meaning they made from them and their stories. If princesses were only shown as being passive and, in a relationship, what did that mean for the representation of women in popular culture? As Trevor McDonald narrated, "television holds up a mirror to who we are" ([ITV 2019](#)), and I recalled memories of me, my friends, and peers holding these princesses up as a mirror to see who *we* were. This has also been commented on by Henry [Giroux \(1996\)](#), who argued that Disney's animated films 'play as the new "teaching machines"' (90). I decided to pursue the princesses (despite some discouragement), and soon learnt how much could be and *was* written on these women, and the global reach they had to young children all over the world.

Who are the Disney Princesses?

David [Buckingham \(1997\)](#) argued 'it is hard to think of a fairy tale or a "classic" children's book which children will not now encounter first (and in most cases *only*) in its "Disneyfied" version' (285), and the Disney Princesses are no exception. The first Disney Princess created in film (and based on fairy tales) was Snow White from *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937). As time passed, the Walt Disney Studios continued to produce princess films that led to merchandising and marketing of princess products. [Buckingham \(1997\)](#) acknowledged how over a long period of time, even after Walt Disney's death, 'the Disney Corporation has transformed itself into a model of contemporary media and entertainment conglomerate' (285). In 2000, the Disney Princess Franchise was created by Andy Mooney, chairman of Disney Consumer Products after seeing girls attempting to dress up as Disney Princesses at a Disney on Ice show:

Standing in line in the arena, I was surrounded by little girls dressed head to toe as princesses. ... They weren't even Disney products. They were generic princess products they'd appended to a Halloween costume. And the light bulb went off. Clearly there was latent demand here. So the next morning I said to my team, "O.K., let's establish standards and a colour palette and talk to licensees and get as much product out there as we possibly can that allows these girls to do what they're doing anyway: projecting themselves into the characters from the classic movies". (Orenstein 2006: n.p.)

It can be argued here then that the Disney Princess Franchise was born out of the Disney Princess Fandom. Disney wanted to enable young consumers to project themselves 'into the characters' of the Disney Princesses (Orenstein 2006: n.p.), and of course, provide an all-new level of consumer meaning making and therefore monetization of their characters. Although ten princesses had already been produced by the Walt Disney Company at this point, they had been marketed separately. Franchising selected princesses answered the demand for the princess products Mooney had seen, and so the Disney Princess Franchise was born. However, not all the princesses that Disney studios had created were included. The initial princess line-up chosen by Mooney was Snow White, Cinderella, Aurora, Ariel, Belle, Jasmine, Pocahontas, Mulan, and Tinkerbell (who was later removed and provided with her own Disney Fairies Franchise) (Orenstein 2006: n.p.). As more princess films were produced, they were added to the franchise.

The franchise now officially consists of eleven princesses: Snow White (1937); Cinderella (1950); Aurora (1959); Ariel (1989); Belle (1991); Jasmine (1992); Pocahontas (1995); Mulan (1998); Tiana (2009); Rapunzel (2010); and Merida (2012). Between them, these princesses made \$1.686 bn licensed retail sales in 2018 alone (*The Licensing Letter* 2019). Their products and films can be found in shops all over the world. Globally, toy companies such as Hasbro and Mattel have battled for the licensing fee just to produce princess dolls. Hasbro won, paying \$500bn 'just for the licensing fee to produce the princesses. So, you can see how big and how successful that product line is' (Interview 2).

However, other Disney Princesses were not officially included in the franchise: Princess Eilwony of *The Black Cauldron* (1985); Kida of *Atlantis: The Lost Empire* (2001); Anna and Elsa of *Frozen* (2013); and Moana of *Moana* (2016).¹ Disney has given no official reason for these exclusions, however, Anna, Elsa, and Moana have started appearing in some franchised marketing and merchandising (Disney Princess Stories:n.d.; shopDisney:n.d.), and Zemler (2022) stated that 'Moana became a Disney Princess in 2019' (42), but – none have received an official coronation ceremony at Walt Disney World. In 2022 for World Princess Week, Raya was also featured in the celebrations (Hendricks 2022). Nevertheless, some of these princesses have

success within their own rights. *Frozen* (2013) made \$1,280,802,282 in the worldwide box office and is currently nineteenth in the worldwide top lifetime grosses of all films. It was the first princess film to make over a billion dollars. Its sequel, *Frozen II*, made \$1,450,026,933, and sits at twelfth in that list. Seven out of the ten films in the top lifetime grosses list were produced by Disney (Box Office Mojo n.d.q). For the purposes of this book Anna, Elsa, and Moana will be regarded as non-franchised princesses.

The princesses are everywhere, when I recall moments from my everyday life: going to the cinema I saw girls dressed as the princess they were going to watch; walking to the shops I saw children begging parents to buy them the latest princess toys or books; chatting with family friends and their children, they would tell me who their favourite princesses are, and why. Though to some the princesses are trivial, to many children in the world, these princesses are their role models, their inspiration, or as Trevor McDonald calls it, their ‘mirror’ to see who they are. Whelan (2014) extends this, arguing that ‘for generations, Disney has used the princess narrative to instill in its viewers an understanding of the position of girls and women in American society’ (177). Therefore, this book echoes Megan Condis’ (2015) argument: ‘it is important for media scholars to examine the ways in which animated princesses help to shape (and are shaped by) discourses of gender and race’ (25). With the global reach of the princesses, there is a wider potential for the princesses to construct the varying images of femininity within their films, merchandising, marketing, and consumer experiences. Therefore, I felt it was imperative to examine such a wide-ranging phenomenon that has captured the hearts of so many people and investigate what images these princesses are producing (Colombo and Muir 2020: 17).²

The princesses are the political

I argue the ‘princesses are the political’, a play on words of the second wave feminist concept of ‘the personal is the political’ (Hanisch 1969). This phrase focuses on how in many areas of politics there are debates between what ‘counts’ as public and private knowledge, activities, and issues, and which of these is included within the mainstream political agenda (Jones and Jónasdóttir 1988:12). Hughes (2002) argues ‘private’ knowledge is not necessarily only focused on women’s private lives, rather, it focuses on how we place political meaning on to ‘women’s everyday experiences of their personal and private lives’ (151–2). However, women’s experiences are often consigned to the private sphere (Bachmann, Harp, and Loke 2018: 4). I argue there is little difference between a woman’s personal life and her experiences. I do not think that women’s experiences are the only experiences to be held within ‘private’ knowledge (Harvey 2020: 10). It can be argued ‘all research is political’, whether it is focused on examining relationships, businesses, or

government (Bell and Encel 1978: 4; Oakley and Cracknell 1981: 54). It may not be considered political in a ‘traditional’ sense, such as examining governmental institutions or policies, however issues that affect people within society is still a matter for political debate and research (Savigny and Warner 2015: 2; Savigny 2020: 2–3). Sexism, racism, ableism, transphobia, and homophobia have been entrenched within societies across the world and still are to this day. They affect individuals across society and must also be debated in the political arena, as well as researched to provide new knowledge and experiences. They are also embedded through different means, some more subtle than others. For example, racist, sexist, transphobic, homophobic, or ableist abuse is a clear overt issue *most* people can recognize. However, racist, sexist, transphobic, homophobic, or ableist images found in media are *sometimes* more covert. In some cases, the lack of diverse representation and not seeing stories that sit outside the cis, hetero, white, patriarchal binary contributes to this. Therefore, to address and remove these images, we must understand how they have become ‘so embedded within our culture’ (Savigny 2020: 4). This has been championed by theories other than feminism such as post-colonialist theory, critical race theory, and queer theory. Although this research is a feminist piece, there are other intersectional fields that focus on subjects traditionally considered to be within the ‘private’ sphere.

Cultural phenomena such as the Disney Princesses could be considered as a trivial issue to focus research on. This is perhaps due to the point of view that the Disney Princesses are simply ‘imaginary’ characters, who therefore have no ‘real’ influence on society, as after all, it’s ‘just a film’. This line of thought has been demonstrated by politicians, who argued that teaching school children about sexism and racism represented in Disney and the media is ‘politically correct claptrap’ (*The Telegraph* 2016). This is simply not the case. My aim in this book is to make the ‘invisible visible’ and render ‘the trivial important’ (Reinharz 1992: 248), arguing the princess *is* the political.

To build this argument, I turn to feminist media studies to highlight how media representations of the Disney Princesses can be considered a political matter. Liesbet van Zoonen (2006) argued ‘the media have always been at the centre of feminist critique’ (11), therefore this research explores the images of femininity within the Disney Princess Phenomenon through the lens of feminist media studies and facet methodology (Muir 2022a).³ Feminist media scholars have argued that women’s representation in the media has often been stereotypical or invisible, with media that is dedicated to showcasing women’s experiences or their interests rendered “trivial” and unworthy of analysis’ (Muir 2022a: 2) in research (Carter and Steiner 2003: 14–15; Tuchman 1978). Although this is changing (Kanzler 2019; Orgad 2017; Sobande 2019; Sykes 2021; Wanzo 2016), there is still a long way to go when it comes to the Disney Princesses. This research adds to the ever-growing body of Disney Princess literature (Craven 2002; Davis 2006; Dundes 2001; Edwards 1999;

England et al 2011; Hefner et al 2017; Lester 2010; Maity 2014; Mollet 2020; Ohmer 2006; Shuler 2015; Stott 2004; Stover 2013; Williams 2020), but also to scholarship related to feminist media studies (Bachmann, Harp, and Loke 2018: 1–2; Gill 2007; Harvey 2020; Kennedy 2018, 2019; Lloyd and Johnson 2003; MacDonald 1995; McRobbie 2009, 2020; Mulvey 1975; Stacey 1994; Tuchman, Kaplan, Daniels, and Benét 1978; Tuchman 1979; van Zoonen 2006; Vares 2002; Whelan 2000). It identifies the narratives and stories of princesses, how these women are portrayed, and who is silenced and ignored (Harvey 2020: 9). More specifically this research builds on Disney Princess literature by expanding on the princess sample, including the non-franchised princesses (Davis 2006) and providing a typology in which to categorize the princesses. It also introduces a comprehensive analysis of new areas for the Disney Princesses: merchandising and consumer experiences. This research contributes an innovative and transferable film analysis framework to Disney Studies that offers a new way to examine various Disney mediums from the Disney Princesses to the *Star Wars* Franchise and the Marvel Cinematic Universe, as well as to categorize the different waves of representation. With the framework being transferable, it can also be adapted to analyse gender, race, sexuality, and disability across a range of franchises (in Disney and beyond). Now, I will turn to defining the Disney Princess Phenomenon.

Defining the Princess Phenomenon

In this book and in my research more widely, I am examining the Disney Princess Phenomenon as opposed to the Disney Princess Franchise. The princesses have also been referred to as a phenomenon by Clapp-Itnyre (2010); Hains (2014); Nash (2015); Reilly (2016); and Zsubori (2021, 2023), this research joins them, additionally distinguishing the Disney Princess Phenomenon from the Disney Princess Franchise to include princesses who have been excluded from the franchise, as well as the wider mediums in which consumers and audiences can engage with the Disney Princesses. I argue the princesses are a phenomenon for four reasons. Firstly, Disney has produced six princesses that have not been included within the Disney Princess Franchise. I want to investigate whether the models of femininity of non-franchised princesses are different to those of the franchised princesses. Secondly, the most recent princess films have included Anna, Elsa, and Moana. These films have featured a different storyline to other princess films, focusing on friendship and adventure rather than romance. It would seem Disney has ‘developed’ the princess film storylines, therefore I wanted to include the new additions to have a complete examination of the princess phenomenon. Thirdly, consumers and audiences can engage with the Disney Princesses in a variety of ways beyond films. There are now Disney Princess products, marketing and consumer experiences that need to be examined.

Finally, the term phenomenon truly emphasizes how popular the princesses are, their global reach is one of the largest in the world (*The Licensing Letter* 2019). The term ‘phenomenon’ also allows me to encompass the vast range of products and experiences in which the Disney Princesses feature.

Therefore, my analysis of the Disney Princess Phenomenon identifies 16 princesses: Snow White (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* 1937), Cinderella (*Cinderella* 1950), Aurora (*Sleeping Beauty* 1959), Eilonwy (*The Black Cauldron* 1985), Ariel (*The Little Mermaid* 1989), Belle (*Beauty and the Beast* 1991), Jasmine (*Aladdin* 1992), Pocahontas (*Pocahontas* 1995), Mulan (*Mulan* 1998), Kida (*Atlantis: The Lost Empire* 2001), Tiana (*The Princess and the Frog* 2009), Rapunzel (*Tangled* 2010), Merida (*Brave* 2012), Anna and Elsa (*Frozen* 2013, *Frozen II* 2019), and Moana (*Moana* 2016). Although Raya and Namaari were beyond the scope of my analysis due to their release date, I include them in the Disney Princess Phenomenon.

There is, I argue, a circular relationship between film and merchandise: each princess features in a film, from which merchandise is created, some of which is used to market the forthcoming film. This can then lead to princesses having a ‘coronation’ ceremony to welcome them into the Disney Princess Franchise, which means they will continue to have their own products *and* be included within franchise merchandise.⁴ Beyond this, the princess may get representation in one or more of Disney’s six theme park resorts which could involve a character ‘meet and greet’ (i.e. an actress dressed up as the princess to meet guests), a stage show, a dining experience, or further theme park merchandising. Disney also licences companies such as Hasbro wishing to produce merchandise that will further the public profile of the princesses. It is beyond the scope of this book to examine such a vast array of products. Therefore, I am examining the Disney corporation’s *own* direct merchandizing and marketing, and consumer experiences. Additionally, because it is Disney’s own direct merchandising, marketing and consumer experiences, these are decisions being made directly by the Walt Disney Company rather than simply approved by them for a license. Because the phenomenon is so present with popular culture and daily life, I argue it can be used as a vehicle to understand how consumers make meaning around images of femininity. To do this, I firstly identify what images of femininity there are, and then which ones are dominant within consumer experiences.

Debates on the representation of gender in Disney Princess films and the wider phenomenon are situated within the fields of Disney studies, gender, and media and communication studies. Some scholars have focused on the franchise as a whole (Davis 2006; England et al 2011; Mollet 2020; Stover 2013), although others have focused on particular princesses (Craven 2002; Dundes 2001; Edwards 1999; Lester 2010; Ohmer 1993; Stott 2004). Although there are merits to both research scopes, analysing the franchise as a whole allows scholars to examine the changes to the princess films as

they continue to be released (Davis 2006), as well as compare and contrast those changes (England et al 2011). Selecting one or two princesses provides an opportunity to analyse the princesses in a greater depth. Within this field, I identified a key debate: the progression and regression of presented gender roles in princess films. Although some discussed the centrality of romance in the films (Garlen and Sandlin 2017; Hefner et al 2017; Maity 2014), and others have analysed merchandise in more depth (Auster and Mansbach 2012; Bryman 1995; Bryman 2010; Stein 2011; Wasko 2001a; Wohlwend 2009), the central argument within the study of Disney Princesses is whether the representations of the heroines have progressed (Davis 2006; Davis 2014; Do Rozario 2004; Hine et al 2018b; Hoerrner 1996; Itmeizeh and Ma'ayeh 2017; Lacroix 2004; Lester 2019; Mollet 2020; Reilly 2016; Wasko 2001a; Zarranz 2007) or regressed (Hains 2015; Rudloff 2016; Stover 2013; Whelan 2012) with time. Others examine the gender roles within the princess films (Craven 2002; Dundes 2001; Dundes et al 2018; England et al 2011; Streiff and Dundes 2017a, Streiff and Dundes 2017b), but do not necessarily compare them to the rest of the princesses. In many cases, it is beyond the scope of the journal articles where the research is outlined for the scholars to be able to go into depth on how depictions of gender have changed. In others, more films have simply been released since publication, which is expected for such a popular phenomenon.

Therefore, this book comprehensively tracks the micro changes that have taken place within the Disney Princess Phenomenon, beginning with the animated films. Although live-action princess films require further analysis as part of the phenomenon, this book is focusing on the original animated films where audiences can engage with all the princesses (rather than just the live-action films that have been produced). Through textual analysis, I identify a typology for the princesses to demonstrate how the representation of femininity differs across films. I extend this further and apply this typology to other key representations of the phenomenon: merchandising, marketing, and park experiences, something which has not been done in significant depth within the study of Disney Princesses. I examine whether the images of femininity found in the films are reflected within merchandising and park experiences, which images of femininity are dominant and which are dormant. I am seeking to complicate our understanding of the princesses. It is not simply a case of some princesses are 'good' and some are 'bad', we must identify how femininity is depicted and how it is continually changing and evolving within the Disney Princess Phenomenon.

Analysing the princesses

To analyse the Disney Princesses as a phenomenon, I took the approach of facet methodology (Mason 2011; Muir 2022a), which allowed me to

creatively explore all areas of the phenomenon. Facet methodology is an ‘evolving approach’ (Mason 2011:75) that allows research to define their phenomenon of interest as a faceted gemstone, containing different sides and reflections, but ultimately making up a single gem. This allowed me to examine the many different sides to the princess phenomenon using a range of research methods to understand and make visible the political importance (Muir 2022a).⁵ I identified three key facets within the Disney Princess Phenomenon in this book: films, merchandising and marketing, and consumer experiences.

In this book I am exploring how femininity is depicted within the Disney Princess Phenomenon in three key ways:

1. How is femininity depicted in the Disney Princess Phenomenon films?
2. Which models of femininity are the most dominant in princess merchandising and marketing?
3. Which models of femininity are the most dominant in princess consumer experiences?

I acknowledge and promote that gender is a spectrum, as opposed to a binary (Darwin 2017; Foss et al 2013; Vaid-Menon 2020). I argue the Disney Princesses have been constructed within a masculine/feminine gender binary due to the gender normative society in which they have been created (Rowe 2019: 24). More widely, as argued by Rowe (2019), ‘cartoons, especially those made by largely conservative corporations such as Disney, clearly label characters as either male *or* female’ (24), therefore I will use the terms femininity and masculinity throughout this book to refer to the binary constructed by Disney.

I understand and define femininity as the behaviours, qualities, characteristics, and hallmarks that have been socially prescribed to women and girls (Laurie et al 2014: 3; Lorber 1994: 14; MacDonald and Dolan 2013). These behaviours and qualities have been developed through socialization (Lorber 1994: 14) and an individual’s environment, social context, and time period (Laurie et al 2014: 4). In addition, the construction of femininity intersects with class, race, age, sexuality, and disability (Laurie et al 2014: 4), and therefore will have different meanings in different societies, cultures, and time periods. To explore what femininity means within the Disney Princess Phenomenon, I have purposefully kept a broader definition of femininity to investigate how it is situated.

These questions allow me to explore how femininity is depicted by the Disney Princesses in their three key areas of exposure to the consumer: films, merchandise and marketing, and park experiences. To identify how femininity is depicted in the phenomenon, I had three main objectives. Firstly, I constructed a transferable film analysis framework in

which to analyse femininity within princess films. It allowed me to examine speech, movement, plot lines, narratives, and treatment of characters to identify characteristics displayed by each princess. This helped me to cluster princesses who shared traits, developing ‘the waves system’ that demonstrated how the portrayal of femininity had changed over time. Secondly, I used the framework to classify how depictions of femininity have changed over time in princess films. Using the waves system, I mapped out the changes in portrayals of femininity, and how this was reflecting society through a cultural historical context. Thirdly, I identified which models of femininity were more dominant within princess merchandising and marketing through content analysis, supplemented with interviews. Finally, I measured which models of femininity were the most dominant within theme park experiences with the princesses through autoethnography. Overall, facet methodology allows me to highlight ‘the intersecting structures’ of the Disney Princess Phenomenon, ‘which through the growing use of different media forms increases understandings of how they intersect and can impact each other’ (Muir 2022a: 3). This allows us to explore how the different facets of the phenomenon (films, merchandising, marketing and theme park experiences) converge and refract, ‘which continually reinforce specific images of femininity to consumers’, providing a more holistic understanding of the Disney Princess Phenomenon (Muir 2022a: 3).

I would also like to take this opportunity to acknowledge (as I have before in Muir 2022a: 7) my own lived experience. Our interpretations are shaped by our experiences, and therefore it is imperative to acknowledge my own position within this analysis. I am a cisgender, heterosexual, middle-class, university educated, white woman. My life has also been embedded within Disney Princess culture since I was a young child. My observations and analysis will be shaped by this (Roberts 2020: 11–12), however this is a significant benefit of facet methodology, because it ‘assumes that the world and what we seek to understand about it is not only lived and experienced, but it is multi-dimensional, contingent, relationally implicated and entwined’ (Mason 2011: 78 cited in Muir 2022a: 7). It is my hope that this book, the analysis framework, and the findings within it will inspire scholars and students to conduct their own analysis on the Disney Princess Phenomenon, not just in relation to gender, but also race (Anjirbag 2018; Banh 2020; Benhamou 2014b; Condis 2015; Dundes and Streiff 2016; Edgerton and Jackson 1996; Edwards 1999; Faherty 2001; Gehlawat 2010; Gregory 2010; Hurley 2005; Lacroix 2004; Lee-Oliver 2020; Lester 2010; Limbach 2013; Ma 2003; Mo and Shen 2000; Moffit 2019; Staninger 2003; Towbin et al 2004; Turner 2013), and in areas that require more attention in our field: queer readings (Griffin 2000; Llompарт and Brugué 2019; Steinhoff 2017); and disability (Berberi and Berberi 2013; Resene 2017; Schwartz et al 2013).

Structure of the book

This book is split into two parts: films and consumer experiences. In [Part 1](#), I introduce the film analysis framework created for and used in this book. I provide guidance on how scholars can use this and adapt it for their own research, including guidance on questions and considerations. [Chapters 1 to 5](#) introduce the five waves within the Disney Princess Phenomenon films: [Chapter 1](#) focuses on the first wave, [Chapter 2](#) on the second, [Chapter 3](#) on the third, [Chapter 4](#) on the fourth, and [Chapter 5](#) on the fifth wave. Each chapter will provide a cultural context to the period the films were produced in, an overview of all characteristics found within the analysis, and an in-depth discussion of the key characteristics of femininity for each wave. At this point, I have identified the images of femininity produced by each wave.

[Chapter 6](#) discusses the merchandising and marketing of the Disney Princess Phenomenon, introducing content analysis as a means of identifying which princess waves (and therefore which images of femininity) are most dominant. I outline the potential explanations for the dominance of certain waves over others. [Chapter 7](#) analyses the dominant images of femininity within Disney Parks consumer experiences through an autoethnography at Walt Disney World. Finally, I conclude this book by discussing the princesses within the phenomenon as role models, arguing that because of their central place within children's entertainment and lives, the princess *is* the political.

PART I

The Films

Introducing the Film Analysis Framework

To analyse the Disney Princess films I created a new film analysis framework to produce a thick description (Geertz 1973) of the film facet of the Disney Princess Phenomenon. Not only will this help scholars in Disney Studies who wish to analyse and create a typology to identify the changes in representation within the Disney Princess Phenomenon or in wider Disney animation/franchises, but due to the transferable nature of the film framework it can be used to explore a variety of popular culture from a feminist media studies perspective. It can also help princess and popular culture fans, parents, and students to critically engage with the media they consume.

Taking a feminist media studies approach to my analysis, I firstly contextualized the princesses, exploring the cultural context each princess film was produced in. Then, I conducted textual analysis of each princess film, examining: plot points; how the princesses are described by other characters; dialogue between princesses and others; *who* is speaking; how other characters behave towards the princess; what behaviours does the princess display herself; what activities does the princess take part in? Through this I identified patterns within each film where princesses were displaying significant traits through their actions or behaviours and labelled these as ‘character traits’. This allowed me to identify and compare different depictions of femininity, which revealed five clusters or ‘waves’, each of which embodies a significantly different model of femininity. To reflect this, there are five separate chapters in the film section. Although the Disney Princesses have been analysed from a feminist and chronological perspective before (Davis 2006; Mollet 2020), this research provides an analytical framework that helps researchers to situate the Disney Princess Phenomenon into waves based of the models of femininity presented by princesses, tracking the micro changes in their development, and identifying catalysts for behavioural and narrative changes within the phenomenon.

I argue this framework is a transferable structure that can be used to analyse a wide range of franchises and cultural phenomenon within Disney Studies, across popular culture, and can be used to examine different demographics such as ethnicity, sexuality, and disability. It is inspired and situated within

the fields of feminist media studies, which has historically centred on questions around representation. However, the study of Disney Princesses does not have a specific framework for analysing representation. Therefore, this section is dedicated to introducing the framework to the field of Disney Studies to encourage fellow scholars to use it in their own analysis for the Disney Princess Phenomenon and beyond. I will now detail the framework, with specific reference to femininity and princesses. However, I would encourage researchers to use this as a transferable framework to explore other intersectional areas, franchises, and cultural phenomenon across Disney Studies, as well as in feminist media studies and the study of popular culture more widely, see [Table 1.1](#).

Table 1.1: Film analysis framework

Question	Guidance and considerations
In what time period were these images created?	What is the cultural and historical context that this film was made in? This may reflect the models of femininity at the time of the film production.
What is the image of woman?	How is the princess portrayed in appearance and speech? What kind of actions does she undertake and in what way? What are her movements like?
How is the image of woman described by others?	How do other characters talk about or to the princess? How do they describe her? How do they treat her?
How do people discuss the situation/wellbeing/future of the woman?	Are people simply talking about her, as if she has no agency within the situation? Do they make assumptions about what she wants? Do they listen to her own wishes? Do they listen to her at all?
How often is the woman featured (especially if the film is about her)?	Does the woman have a lot of screen time, and if so, what is she doing? Does she get to speak a lot, or is she in the background?
What roles do women have to play within this film?	What kind of activities does the princess take part in? Does she exercise agency in these activities?
What do these images suggest about women?	What are the wider cultural implications of portraying women in this way?

How to use the film analysis framework

I watched the Disney Princess films chronologically to trace the cultural history of each film. It also allowed me to map the changes that took place within each film. During film analysis I took extensive notes on each film, with the questions from my film analysis framework in mind. I also noted quotes that would provide supporting evidence for the ways in which the princesses were portrayed. Watching the films in chronological order may

have impacted findings in the sense that the typologies identified were split chronologically, however I would argue that as these films were being produced, attitudes and perceptions of femininity were constantly changing, which was reflected within the differing typologies. All these different factors contributed to the dominant characteristics of each princess.

By characteristics, I mean the traits that each princess displayed throughout her film, for example being domesticated, or assertive. Each princess exhibited numerous characteristics but not all of these were defining. Therefore, I identified the commonly shared characteristics shared by different princesses. For a characteristic to be shared, each princess within the 'wave' had to display it significantly (i.e. multiple times) throughout the film. For example, Pocahontas, Mulan, and Kida each demonstrated leadership as a dominant character trait several times throughout their films. There were some instances where there was an anomaly such as Princess Eilonwy who had a mixture of first, second, and even third wave traits, or where a princess did not necessarily share every single characteristic, such as Ariel. However, dominant patterns of femininity were clearly emerging from each film. Each wave of princesses produced four to six shared characteristics which were analysed in depth throughout each chapter. This helped me to identify models of femininity that were present (and dominant) in each film. I could then establish how femininity was depicted in the Disney Princess films and examine the shifts and changes that occurred in these models over time.

The result of this analysis and its resultant typology is what I called the 'waves' system,¹ to indicate the changing models of femininity as opposed to indicating a consistent progression or rigid definitions of progress. I use Nicola Rivers' (2017) conceptualization of waves to acknowledge 'the more complex and cyclical nature' of the Disney Princess Phenomenon (2). Although Rivers is referring to feminist history here, I argue her reconceptualization of feminist waves as:

conveying the strength of feminist movements, yet acknowledges both where specific waves diverge and overlap, as well as the multiplicity of feminisms, is to envisage a wave as allowing for a movement that is constantly in flux, rolling back as often as it rolls forward, gaining strength from what it brings with it rather than losing momentum due to what it leaves behind. (Rivers 2017: 22)

This is the perfect solution to describing the complexity of the images of femininity found in Disney Princess films. Each wave is not distinct, there are shared and overlapping characteristics (Rivers 2017: 20). Previously in Disney Princess research, scholars such as Amy Davis (2006) and Tracey Mollet (2020) have periodized the princesses. Other scholars have provided a typology for the princesses including waves (Whelan 2012, 2014) and

generations (Reilly 2016). However, to date, there has been little written on how the princesses have been placed into these ‘waves’ or ‘generations’ other than their chronological position. Thanks to my film analysis framework that enables researchers to track micro changes in the princess films and categorize them, I provide more in-depth analysis for each princess and therefore further justification for my waves system than previous typologies. The waves system also identified patterns between the princesses and highlighted where these patterns were shared and began to change over time, especially in cases of regression as opposed to just consistent progression of images of femininity. Therefore, the waves system provides Disney Studies with an updated overview of each Disney Princess, as well as a new way to categorize the representation of Disney Princesses and beyond.

As previously discussed, the Disney Princess Phenomenon consists of 16 princesses who feature in Disney Animation Studios and Pixar Studios films: Snow White, Cinderella, Aurora, Eilonwy, Ariel, Belle, Jasmine, Pocahontas, Mulan, Kida, Tiana, Rapunzel, Merida, Anna, Elsa, and Moana. The following five chapters will be dedicated to exploring how femininity is depicted within each film and identifying the dominant models. In each of the five following film chapters I will first situate the ‘wave’ within the cultural context relevant to the time of its release. I summarize the character traits found within each film, and which traits were shared and will be discussed. The remainder of the chapter focuses on the analysis of each trait. This will place the princess films within a historical and cultural context and how these dominant images of femininity are constructed within the films. This will allow me to compare which models are heavily featured within the next area of the phenomenon: merchandising/marketing and consumer experiences.

‘Passive Dreamers’: The Beginning of the Disney Princess Phenomenon

The first wave of princess films was released between 1937 and 1959, a time of financial hardship, war, and societal change. The Great Depression, President Roosevelt’s ‘New Deal’, and America entering World War II after the bombing of Pearl Harbor changed societal roles for women and men significantly.

Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937) was Walt Disney’s first full-length feature animation, and the first of its kind. It was released at a time when millions of workers were losing their jobs; farmers and sharecroppers lost their livelihoods due to extreme drought; and there were no social security or unemployment benefit schemes to support workers until after 1935 (Jones 2004:429). Despite this, women had been granted access to many areas of the workplace, as well as political office. Hattie Wyatt Caraway became the first female elected to the US Senate, and Frances Perkins was appointed as the first female within the US Cabinet as the Secretary of Labour. However, these ‘firsts’ were short lived (Mollet 2020: 21), with The National Recovery Act (1932) only allowing one family member to hold a government job (Deutsch 2000: 453), resulting in many female government workers becoming unemployed (Evans 1997: 201–2). Dominant sectors for women to find work were ‘sales, communications, and secretarial work’ (Jones 2004: 430). The 1930 census cited 10,752,116 (around 22 per cent of women in the US) as ‘gainfully employed’ (Census 1930: 6), whereas by 1940, 13,007,480 women were employed (Census 1940a: 29), and 37,464,420 women were not considered to be in the labour force (Census 1940b: 57). For Black women this period was even more difficult (Mollet 2020: 22). They could only find part-time or seasonal work, were not paid a living wage due to sexual and racial discrimination, and were exploited within the workplace (Jones 2004: 429). In the 1930s and 1940s, communications, sales, and secretarial

work were dominated by white women (Jones 2004: 430), and ‘nine out of ten Black women workers toiled as agricultural or domestic servants’ (Jones 2004: 429). In some cases, where Black women were employed within manufacturing, it would be in the most dangerous areas where their health was put at risk (May 2000: 482). This meant that although some opportunities were presented to white women, they were not extended to Black women (Mollet 2020: 22). In 1935, Mary McLeod Bethune founded the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW), which is still active to this day, focusing on its mission ‘to lead, empower and advocate for women of African descent, their families and communities’ (NCNW n.d.) demonstrating the activism and service of Black women to eradicate racism.

Cassandra Stover (2013) has suggested that despite the advance of women’s rights, ‘the very first Disney princess drew on associations of traditional femininity, indicating the widespread encouragement of these traits within 1930’s American culture’ (2). Although women were able to vote and enter the labour market as never before, Disney’s *Snow White* fitted the established model of ‘voiceless heroines who performed conventional gender behaviors like housekeeping and nurturing’ (Stover 2013: 2). Despite The Great Depression, *Snow White* was a huge box office success: ‘*Snow White* soon became the highest-grossing film of all time, a record it held until it was surpassed by *Gone with the Wind*. Now Walt Disney’s studio had firmer footing. The short cartoons paid the bills, but Walt knew that future profits would come from feature films’ (D23: n.d.).

The first feature animated film, *Snow White*, cost around \$2,000,000 to produce. It was a shock to not only the animation industry for its cost, but the wider film industry as well (Davis 2006: 89). This led to *Snow White* being described as ‘Disney’s Folly’, but these criticisms became redundant when it became a box office success (Davis 2006: 89), making \$66,596,803 (Box Office Mojo n.d.a). Perhaps due to the financial hardship and uncertain future of the US, consumers wanted to use popular culture to escape their economic and employment worries (Gabler 2006: 273). However, Tracey Mollet argues that at this time ‘popular culture stressed conformity. For men and women in this era, conformity equated to heterosexual partnership, marriage and a stable home life in the suburbs’ (2020: 24).

Between 1937 and 1950 there were more changes. The 1941 attack on Pearl Harbour led America to enter World War II, with 16 million American troops serving. This was a new time for women, as each of the armed services created branches for them to serve in 1942. However, segregation laws were still impacting Black women. Although around 350,000 women served in the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP), Marine Corps Women’s Reserve (MCWR), Women’s Army Corps (WAC), US Coast Guard Women’s Reserve (SPARS), and Women Accepted for Voluntary Emergency Service (WAVES) (navy) (May 2000: 485–6), Black women

predominantly served in the army, experiencing marginalization during service, and erasure after the war finished – their achievements overlooked due to the focus on Black servicemen and white servicewomen (Bolzenius 2019). Women's involvement in the workforce rose, with them replacing men who were serving in the war (May 2000: 476). However, they were confined to 'female' roles based on a sexual division of labour such as taping coils and inspections of parts (Milkman 2004: 468–9). After the war ended in 1945, women were replaced as men returned home to their old jobs – even though women wanted to continue working, there were no jobs available for them (May 2000: 491). Books such as *The Modern Woman: The Lost Sex* (1947) argued that 'women's inner balance' could only be restored through returning to 'traditional' domestic life, where women are 'pro-family' and 'anti-workplace'. Basinger (1993) also argued that the films of the 1950s had to demonstrate to women that choosing another path outside of the traditional domestic life would be a disaster, Mollet argues this is 'particularly important for understanding the characterizations of the villainesses in these early Disney fairy tales' (2020: 25).

The Walt Disney Company did not release another princess film until 1950. Although the company had begun work on projects such as *Pinocchio* and *Fantasia* in the 1940s, World War II had a huge effect on their profit (D23 n.d.). Due to Disney losing their foreign markets through the war, their film costs became too high to produce good quality films, meaning other releases such as *Dumbo* had to have limited budgets (D23 n.d.; Wasko 2001a: 19). During the war, Disney also created films commissioned by the State Department such as *Saludos Amigos* and *The Three Caballeros*, as well as military training videos (D23 n.d.; Wasko 2001a: 17, 19). By the time the war was over, Disney had to resort back to films made up of short animations and live-action productions (D23 n.d.). As Janet Wasko explained, Disney used the late 1940s to transition from post-war production to new ventures to accommodate the changing market of entertainment (Wasko 2001a: 20).

Their first full length animation since World War II, *Cinderella* (1950) grossed \$10,000,000 (Box Office Mojo n.d.b). *Cinderella* appeared after the upheavals of World War II, which had seen women 'leading the war effort at home and managing entire households and companies on their own' (Stover 2013: 2–3). Instead of reflecting those changes, the movie further reinforced traditional ideas (Stover 2013: 3).

After *Cinderella*, it would be nearly a decade until another princess film was released. Within that time, women continued to be decentred, with the Democratic Party abolishing its women's division, National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) conducting astronaut tests with a female participant, but ultimately cancelling the women's programme in 1963. Due to the economic boom, and households being able to run on one income, women's roles began to shift from the workplace to homemaking. There

were however some changes. In 1954, the *Brown v Board of Education of Topeka* declared racial segregation in US public schools unconstitutional. This sparked boycotts around other areas still segregated such as public transport. In 1955, Claudette Colvin refused to give up her seat on a bus to a white woman, protesting against segregated seating (Younge 2000). Nine months later, Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a bus to a white man, also protesting against the racial segregation enforced on the public transport system (May 2000: 520), which contributed to the beginning of the civil rights' movement where many Black women were politically active (Payne 2004: 533). The late 1950s also brought new household appliances, such as washing machines, that would save housewives time and effort on hard labour tasks. These appliances were not necessarily intended to give women more time to do other things such as careers or hobbies, rather they were to improve the standard and efficiency of housework (May 2000: 501).

Sleeping Beauty (1959) was the second top grossing film at \$36,479,805 (Box Office Mojo n.d.c). Despite this, *Sleeping Beauty* was not well received by audiences, perhaps indicating an early post-war restiveness with established gender stereotypes (Stover 2013: 3). First wave princess films were shorter than their successors (most likely due to feature animation films being a newer and more expensive venture), and therefore did not always have the opportunity to develop the most detailed characters and storylines.

The years between 1937 and 1959 was a time of huge change for women, with them being given greater access to politics and the workplace, but ultimately having that access curtailed as men returned from war to their old jobs. This led to an encouragement for women to return to the home, rather than to go into university and the labour market. The idea of romance and homemaking is reflected within first wave films. Romance, perhaps serving as a figure of hope in dark times, but also reflecting ideas about women returning to their role as homemakers, rather than entering the world of work.

First wave characteristics

When watching the first wave princess films, I noted several characteristics through speech, movement, narrative, and plot lines. Snow White was depicted as a domesticated, passive, naive, positively minded, gentle, graceful, helpless victim who desired a romantic relationship. Other characters saw Snow White as wicked (Grumpy the dwarf, who believes women are wicked), beautiful, and someone to take care of. Cinderella was also portrayed as a domestic, passive, helpless victim who eventually desires a romantic relationship once she meets the prince. However, Cinderella does display some confident and, in some cases, even assertive behaviour. Other characters saw her as a servant (the Tremaine family), someone to marry, to take care

of, as beautiful, graceful, kind, and gentle. Cinderella also displayed some mothering traits, especially towards her animal companions. Meanwhile, Aurora, who had a short role in her own film was also portrayed as a naive, domestic, passive, helpless victim. She desired a romantic relationship and was seen by other characters as a political tool, gentle, graceful, beautiful, someone to marry, and someone with little to no autonomy.

I identified 19 characteristics in total across the films, and understood it was beyond the scope of this book to discuss each characteristic in depth. Some characteristics were seen multiple times, whereas others were only seen once or twice. To provide a thick description (Geertz 1973) of the first wave, I only discuss characteristics that were shared between all princesses within the wave and appeared more than once within the film to provide an in-depth analysis. In this chapter, I will discuss domesticity, passivity, victimhood, and desiring a romantic relationship.

Domesticity

Each princess demonstrated their adherence to domesticity throughout their film (Towbin et al 2004: 31; England et al 2011: 563). Both Snow White and Cinderella were forced into unpaid labour by their stepmothers. The element of force indicated both Snow White and Cinderella were enslaved by their stepfamily, making it more difficult for them to escape servitude. The first time we saw Snow White she was dressed in rags and working as a scullery maid, scrubbing the floors of the palace gardens. Cinderella was forced into unpaid labour by her stepmother, Lady Tremaine. She was forced to serve and look after the entire chateau in France and wait hand and foot on her stepfamily (England et al 2011: 563). Amy Davis argued ‘they are shown performing quite hard physical labour (although, of course, their beauty and gentility shine through despite their rags)’ (Davis 2006: 101). Although both princesses were forced into servitude, there is a difference between the two women. Cinderella was forced into domesticity and did not escape it until the end of the film. However, although Snow White escaped from her role as a scullery maid at the beginning; she seemed to enjoy it, singing the song ‘Whistle While You Work’ (Maity 2014: 29) and relied on her domesticity as a bargaining tool for her own safety. Snow White was depicted as the only princess to enjoy housework, however for Cinderella it was an enforced burden. On the other hand, Aurora was not seen conducting as many domestic tasks as she spent very little time on screen.

When Snow White discovered the dwarfs’ cottage in the forest, she immediately noticed how untidy and dirty it was. There were plates everywhere, dust on the surfaces, dirt on the windows. Snow White was shocked, exclaiming “You’d think their mother would – oh! Maybe they have no mother” (Snow White: 1937). Snow White thus associated a clean house

with a woman's presence (Ayres 2003: 44; England et al 2011: 563). Here, the image of femininity was constructed through the absence of women. This suggested that a woman's role was to ensure the house was clean and tidy – with men having no part to play in maintaining the house, an extreme dichotomy of gender stereotypes. If a house had no female presence, the housework would simply not get done.

This was reinforced when Snow White discovered that the seven dwarfs who lived there were completely incapable of housework, as she identified stacks of dirty crockery and thick layers of dust on the surfaces – presumably because they had never had a 'feminine' influence in the house. However, the state of the house could also be that the dwarfs had no desire to clean and tidy it. Perhaps it was at this point in the film that Snow White realized that her life of domesticity would benefit her (Gehlawat 2010: 427), and she exclaimed, "We'll clean the house and surprise them. Then maybe they'll let me stay". With that, she delegated cleaning tasks to her newfound animal friends and began to sing her way through housekeeping. She also used her domestic abilities to ask to stay at the cottage when she finally met the dwarfs (Davis 2006: 101). She offered to 'keep house' and the dwarfs eagerly accepted when they heard that she could 'wash and sew and sweep and cook'. This once again affirmed that the dwarfs themselves were either incapable of housework or just refused to do it. However, it was only through housework that Snow White was able to demonstrate any assertiveness within her character. She was able to delegate tasks to the forest animals and scold the dwarfs for not washing their hands before dinner, but beyond this Snow White indicated no assertive characteristics throughout the film (England et al 2011: 562–3; Layng 2001: 201).

Cinderella was somewhat similar in this respect and was unable to show any assertive characteristics other than with animals during household duties (England et al 2011: 562–3). Throughout the film, Cinderella could be observed completing several different duties: feeding the animals (horses, chickens, and Lucifer the cat) of the chateau; preparing breakfast for her stepfamily and cleaning the floor. In addition to this, Cinderella was instructed to do further tasks by her stepfamily: mending and sewing clothes; laundry; ironing; cleaning carpets, windows, tapestries and draperies; tending to the garden and the terrace; sweeping the halls and the stairs; cleaning the chimneys, and bathing Lucifer the cat. She accepted all these tasks without saying a word (Koppy 2021: 82). Although she indicated that she was aware of her mistreatment as a servant in her own home at the beginning of the film, Cinderella was unable to escape her life of unpaid labour until she married Prince Charming (Henke et al 1996: 241–2).¹ After that, it was unknown whether she continued domestic duties in the same way as Snow White.

Princess Aurora of *Sleeping Beauty* (1959) was seen doing some domestic tasks. Like Snow White, the first time a 'grown up' Aurora was seen, she

was cleaning the windows of the cottage she resided in with her aunts (who were really the Three Good Fairies). Other than this and picking berries in the forest, Aurora did not complete any other unpaid domestic labour. This may be due to her not being featured in most of the film as she fell under a sleeping curse and had to wait to be rescued. Nevertheless, in the scenes she was in, Aurora conducted mostly domestic tasks.

Each of these women were portrayed as domestic to different extents, and in different ways. Snow White was forced into domesticity by her stepmother but chose to continue (and almost took joy) in conducting unpaid labour. It was one of the only activities she undertook throughout the film. Although Cinderella was also forced into domesticity by her stepmother, she may not have chosen to continue it once freed from servitude. However, as she was only freed at the end of the film, we would have to look to sequel films to assess whether Cinderella continues with this particular characteristic.² Like Snow White, Cinderella sang while she did her chores, however this did not seem to be out of joy. It was clear how unhappy Cinderella was with her situation when she sighed, "Alright, alright. I'm coming! Oh my goodness. Morning, noon and night". This not only showed how overworked she was as a servant in her own home, but that she was also miserable with it. Snow White made no indication of her unhappiness as a scullery maid or her mistreatment. Aurora was the least 'domestic' of the three princesses, where we observed her completing only two domestic tasks. However, Aurora did not feature in most of *Sleeping Beauty* so it was challenging to assess whether Aurora would be more or less domestic if she were to be awake throughout the film.

Overall, this characteristic is shared among the three women and contributes to the first wave model of femininity, reinforcing the image that housework is a woman's role. I argue this is the most significant point. Housework as a task within itself is necessary to have a clean and tidy home. The issue with the first wave Disney Princesses is that it is only women who are portrayed as conducting any housework. Male characters contribute nothing to the upkeep of a house or a castle. Constructing the image of women tending to the house while the male characters are elsewhere suggests a woman's role is to tend to the home and this role is not extended to men. Therefore, these princess films are reinforcing accepted societal ideas through mass media. In films produced in the 1930s that did depict strong women through actresses such as Bette Davis and Katherine Hepburn, their empowerment was short lived when a 'stronger' man was able to overpower the 'strong' woman (Evans 1997: 197–8; Deutsch 2000: 454). Often, films would resolve issues of empowered women with domesticity and marriage (Evans 1997: 197–8). With Snow White, Cinderella, and Aurora being produced within or relatively close to that period, Disney studios were imposing traditional ideas of femininity in a similar way, but without empowered women to begin with.

As discussed in the 'Introduction', when the USA officially entered World War II, 'activities once viewed as inappropriate for women suddenly became patriotic duties for which women were perfectly suited' (Evans 1997: 219). With the absence of men, women were able to join areas of the workforce that had been previously inaccessible, and many women wanted to remain in employment (Evans 1997: 224–5). However, Evans notes that 'government and media propaganda consistently reassured Americans that while women would do their civic duty for the duration, they would certainly return to their traditional roles once the emergency was over' (1997: 226). Although media can reflect current demands in society, it also has a role of producing ideals (Evans 1997: 226) which demonstrates how media and society are in a continual cycle of shaping one another. The domesticity found in first wave films is not only reflective of pre-war gender roles, but also imposes traditional ideas of femininity on its audience to remind them of their original roles. First wave princess films reinforce domesticity as an ideal for women to embody in real society.

Passivity

Throughout each film, first wave princesses demonstrated their passivity through reactions to cruel requests or life changing experiences. The American Psychological Association (hereafter: APA) defined passivity as, 'a form of adaptation, or maladaptation, in which the individual adopts a pattern of submissiveness, dependence, and retreat into inaction' (APA n.d.a). I defined passivity as the lack of resistance to authority, resulting in docile and yielding behaviour within any situation. The image of passivity was reflected within each of the first wave princess films. Each of the princesses, when presented with cruelty or life-changing experiences simply accepted the situation without complaint or resistance, despite being unhappy (Hoerrner 1996: 223).

Snow White displayed images of passivity on three occasions within *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. Firstly, she accepted her new position as a maid in her own home. Secondly, she accepted she was about to be killed by the huntsman. Finally, she allowed herself to be guided through the forest to find a new home, accepting her new life without resistance. When the Evil Queen forced Snow White to become a scullery maid, she carried out her duties without complaint. When the huntsman tried to kill her, she screamed and covered her face, but made no attempt to run away or defend herself. Although Davis (2006) has argued that she 'at least flees from danger' (101), her life was only saved when the huntsman realized that he could not kill her. She made no attempt to leave the situation and had to follow instructions from the huntsman to save her own life (Layng 2001: 200). This demonstration of passivity continued when she asked her newfound animal

friends to take her to a place where she could stay. The birds physically took Snow White to the dwarfs' cottage. Some of the birds were even pulling her along through the forest by her cape and adjusted it when the cape got stuck on tree branches. Snow White was completely docile, allowing birds to guide her through an unknown forest rather than looking for a safe place herself (Layng 2001: 201).

Cinderella continued this docile and passive behaviour (Henke et al 1996: 234). A servant in her own home, Cinderella made it clear that she was aware she was being cruelly mistreated: "Even he [*the palace clock*] orders me around ... Well, there's one thing. They can't order me to stop dreaming. And perhaps someday, the dreams that I wish will come true".

Cinderella demonstrated passivity by stating that she would 'wish' for her dreams to come true, rather than actively doing something about them (Clapp-Itnyre 2010: 10). The audience were not privy to what these dreams were, but Cinderella did make it clear that she was constantly wishing during the song 'A Dream is a Wish Your Heart Makes'. Cinderella was not necessarily living in an environment where she could actively pursue her dreams, whatever they were. Therefore, Cinderella continued to be portrayed as passive as she was aware of her dreams but did nothing to achieve them. This characteristic was extended when Cinderella complained about her treatment while preparing the family breakfast, conducting chores, and being locked in a tower by her stepmother. She passively accepted any berating from her family with a simple "Yes, Stepmother", even if it was completely undeserved. For example, when Lucifer the cat captured one of Cinderella's mice friends in a teacup, which Cinderella unknowingly took to one of her stepsisters, she was reprimanded for playing a cruel prank. In this case, Cinderella did try to defend herself but was silenced by her stepmother and punished with further chores:

Cinderella:	Oh please, you don't think that I –
Lady Tremaine:	Hold your tongue! Now, hm. It seems we have time on our hands.
Cinderella:	But I was only trying to –
Lady Tremaine:	Silence! [<i>Cinderella looks down at the floor and drops her hands by her side</i>] Time for vicious practical jokes. Perhaps we can put it to better use. Now, let me see. There's the large carpet in the main hall. Clean it! And the windows, upstairs and down. Wash them! Oh yes [<i>smiles</i>] and the tapestries and the draperies –
Cinderella:	But I just finish –
Lady Tremaine:	Do them again! [<i>Cinderella's face falls and she continues to look down</i>]

Cinderella, despite her attempts, failed to defend herself to her stepmother, and even tried to prevent her workload from getting higher by explaining she had already cleaned the tapestries. This was the only time in which Cinderella actively demonstrated her unhappiness and tried to improve her situation, and she ultimately failed. In some ways, Cinderella's image of passivity was more problematic than Snow White's. Although displaying passivity, Snow White indicated no awareness or knowledge of her mistreatment. Cinderella was fully aware of her cruel mistreatment both verbally and visually but was unable to do anything about it (Henke et al 1996: 235–6, 243). Not only was Cinderella's exploitation focused on in greater detail than Snow White's; it was significantly worse. At that time Snow White had the Huntsman to tell her to leave because her life was in danger, Cinderella had no one and nowhere to go. Although at some points she tried to suggest things to her stepmother, it made no impact.³ It could be argued that the constant silencing from Lady Tremaine contributes to Cinderella's passivity, however she still maintained her dreaming throughout the film.

One way Cinderella continued to dream was when she left the palace ball and discovered she had one glass slipper left that did not disappear with the rest of her magical outfit. She decided to keep it, perhaps as a memento of her evening, but was also able to use it to prove her identity as the mystery woman who danced with the Prince. Belinda Stott questioned whether Cinderella could be regarded as a 'passive victim when she has the forethought to conceal and hold onto a symbol that represents both her true worth and the pathetic incongruity of her present victim position, only to produce it at the most opportune moment?' (2004: 17). Although Cinderella was able to produce the slipper once the animals had saved her from being locked in the tower by Lady Tremaine, there was no plot development or story lines to suggest that Cinderella kept the slipper to remove herself from victimhood. No dialogue or storyline indicated Cinderella's intentions with the slipper, it could simply be read as a matter of coincidence more than Cinderella plotting to leave the Tremaine household. This not only suggested that the image of femininity was passive, but that there were no opportunities or desires for the princess to improve her situation, she merely accepted it (Henke et al 1996: 243).

Aurora also displayed images of passivity (Davis 2006: 101; Henke et al 1996: 234; Hine et al 2018a: 2). These images were constructed through Aurora's yielding acceptance of her newfound royal status (Henke et al 1996: 236). Due to the curse placed on her as a baby, Aurora was taken into the forest and raised as a peasant girl by the Three Good Fairies. For the first 16 years of her life, she was unaware of her own identity, or the identity of her caregivers. On her sixteenth birthday, the Three Good Fairies informed her that they would return her to the castle where she

would regain her status as a princess and marry Prince Phillip, a man she had been betrothed to since birth. They also told her that her real name was Aurora, not Briar Rose. Aurora was deeply upset with these revelations, especially as she could not meet the boy she met earlier that day in the forest. She ran upstairs, crying. Like Cinderella, Aurora demonstrated her unhappiness with a life-changing experience. However, when the time came to leave the only life she knew, Aurora followed the fairies to the palace without resistance. She made no attempt to stop this from happening, nor did she question why she had been lied to for her entire life. Her next development within the plot was to prick her finger on a spinning wheel and fall under a sleeping curse, rendering her completely helpless for the rest of the film. This forced passivity onto Aurora as she was given no means within the storyline to help herself. The story of her rescue continued without her and analysis on Aurora's depiction was sometimes limited due to this. Aurora's yielding behaviour and lack of presence in her own film (through no fault or control of her own) demonstrated her passivity (Henke et al 1996: 236).

The most problematic element of this characteristic was how each woman's display of passivity was rewarded at the end of the film. First wave princesses are what I describe as 'passive dreamers', they waited for their dreams to come to them and made no attempt to pursue them. Snow White demonstrated this through the song 'I'm Wishing/One Song', hoping that the 'one she loves' would find her that day. Snow White was dreaming of her 'love', but she wanted *him* to find *her*. She did not indicate at any point that she would try to find him. Cinderella also wished for her dreams to come true in 'A Dream is a Wish Your Heart Makes' but made no attempt to pursue them herself. Aurora also indicated that she was wishing for someone to love in 'I Wonder', and explained to her animal friends that she kept dreaming of a prince: 'But they say if you dream a thing more than once, it's sure to come true. And I've seen him so many times'.

Like her predecessors, Aurora made no attempt to pursue her dream. Her love interest both physically and metaphorically had to find her. Despite each princess' yielding and docile behaviour and their inability to pursue their desires, they were each rewarded for their passivity. Snow White was reunited with her Prince, Cinderella married Prince Charming, and Aurora's love interest from the forest was actually her betrothed, Prince Phillip, and they all lived 'happily ever after'. This suggests that when a woman is passive and submissive under duress and cruel treatment – rather than actively trying to dismantle or remove herself from this mistreatment or unfortunate situation – she would eventually be rewarded for it. This reward was emancipation from cruelty or a life changing experience in the form of a heterosexual relationship with a man. This romance was the 'end' of the story, indicating that these princesses had achieved their final goal – a relationship.

Victimhood

I also observed victimhood as an indicator for femininity within first wave films. The APA defined a victim as ‘an individual who is the target of another person’s violent, discriminatory, harassing, or assaultive behaviors’ (APA n.d.b). While considering this definition, I have also defined victimhood as the unfortunate or mistreated state in which a character finds themselves through no fault of their own, but they do not have the agency within the narrative to emancipate themselves. I will also consider the relationship between the first wave princesses’ lack of agency and their victimhood, as this image reinforced women’s roles as victims who are unable to fend for themselves. The APA defines agency as ‘the state of being active, usually in the service of a goal, or of having the power and capability to produce an effect or exert influence’ (APA n.d.c). In the case of the first wave, I argue that a lack of agency and victimhood go hand in hand. Not only are the princesses victimized, but part of their victimization is having their sense of agency removed within their narrative. Each of the three first wave films produced the image of victimhood in different ways, but all by older women who were bitter or jealous of the princess in some way.⁴ Each time, they were ‘rescued’ by the male protagonist and love interest (Davis 2014: 48; Whelan 2012: 23, 24).

Snow White was presented as a victim at the beginning of her storyline. The Evil Queen, Snow White’s stepmother, ordered the royal huntsman to kill Snow White so that she could maintain her status as the fairest one of all.⁵ Following orders, the huntsman took Snow White into the forest and raised his dagger to stab her. Noticing a shadow behind her, Snow White turned and saw the huntsman trying to kill her. She screamed and covered her face but made no other attempt to defend herself. This is understandable given the traumatic nature of this scene. Snow White’s life was spared only through the huntsman’s moral conscience: “I can’t. I can’t do it! Forgive me. I beg of Your Highness, forgive me”. Snow White was indirectly rescued by her own perpetrator because he could not bring himself to harm her – perhaps because she looked so helpless (Davis 2014: 48). The huntsman then warned Snow White about the Evil Queen. He told her that her life was in danger and that she should run into the forest to escape. Snow White was clearly distressed as she continually moves and shakes her head, widens her eyes, and opens her mouth in shock. She ran through the forest as it got darker and darker, shielding herself with her arms and continually screaming, demonstrating how frightened she was. Eventually she collapsed on the floor, sobbing. This scene demonstrated Snow White’s image as a victim by identifying two factors. Firstly, she had been persecuted by the Evil Queen due to her beauty, and because of this she had to abandon the only life she had known to try and save her own (at the instruction of

the huntsman). Secondly, she ran through the forest, visibly distressed, unable to defend herself, or protect herself in any way. She had been denied agency to be able to help herself. It wasn't until curious forest animals found her collapsed in a heap that she was able to go and find sanctuary in the cottage.

When the Evil Queen discovered that Snow White was not dead, she transformed herself into an old hag and created a poisoned apple that would produce a death-like sleep. The Queen knew that Snow White would be alone and vulnerable, intending to take advantage of it. Disguised, the Evil Queen told Snow White that she had "a magic wishing apple" that would make all her dreams come true. Convinced, Snow White took a bite of the apple and immediately felt unwell, passing out on the floor. From this point, until she was woken by the Prince, Snow White was completely incapable of rescuing herself from the curse (Whelan 2012: 24). Snow White became a victim again because she was physically and mentally unable to defend or rescue herself. She had to simply wait, sleeping, until her 'true love' arrived and gave her 'true love's first kiss' (Maity 2014: 29; Whelan 2012: 24; Youngs 1999: 312).

Cinderella was portrayed as a victim in two ways throughout her film. Like Snow White, Cinderella's stepmother was: 'Cold, cruel, and bitterly jealous of Cinderella's charm and beauty, she was grimly determined to forward the interests of her own two awkward daughters'. Because of this the narrator explained that 'Cinderella was abused, humiliated, and finally forced to become a servant in her own house'. Unlike Snow White, she did not run away and there was no option for her to simply leave, demonstrating Cinderella's lack of agency provided in her storyline (Henke et al 1996: 235). Cinderella had to remain as a servant in the household, and there seemed to be no way for her to escape her life of servitude. This presented Cinderella as a helpless victim as the narrative provided her with no outlets to escape. Like Snow White, the thought of leaving or escaping had just not occurred to Cinderella (Davis 2014: 49). Of course, this was much easier said than done. Presumably, in the fictional context in which *Cinderella* was set, it would be impossible for her to leave as she would have nowhere safe for a young woman to go. She would have no money, no property, and no guardian. Therefore, in the case of Cinderella, the way that she did escape from servitude was by marrying Prince Charming, whom she met at the ball. Prince Charming in effect rescued Cinderella through marriage. Cinderella married her way out of victimhood.

Images of victimhood continued when Lady Tremaine realized that it was Cinderella that the prince was looking for. To prevent her from having the opportunity to try on the glass slipper and prove her identity, Lady Tremaine locked her in a tower. Cinderella sobbed and begged to be let out, hanging onto the door handle, trying to open it. Again, she found herself in a position where she was unable to help herself and had to rely on her animal friends

to rescue her. Belinda Stott, however, argued that once she was let out by the mice, she was able to demonstrate her empowerment and agency (2004: 17). Stott argued that Cinderella asking the Grand Duke if she could try on the glass slipper (and was able to produce the other slipper when Lady Tremaine orchestrated the original slipper to be broken), ‘Cinderella is able to salvage her rightful destiny’ (Stott 2004: 17). Stott’s point is an alternative take on how Cinderella was presented, as once she was able to get out of entrapment, she was able to demonstrate agency over her future. I argue the issue of her being unable to leave the tower by herself is still problematic, as it implies the lack of agency. Her reliance on animals magnified this further and without them she was not able to leave by herself, whereas audiences have seen princes jump over walls to get to their desired location. This image reinforced women’s roles as victims who are simply unable to fend for themselves. Particularly with the case of *Cinderella*, women demonstrated that when they were victims, the solution is to simply rely on animal friends to help, or marry out of it, rather than find an alternative solution.

Although Aurora was asleep during most of her eponymous film, her character also reinforced the image of being a helpless victim. Upon her arrival at the palace, she was left alone by her guardians, the Three Good Fairies, to contemplate her new life. However, it was at this point where Maleficent the evil fairy was able to distract Aurora and lead her to a tower with a magical orb. Enchanted, Aurora followed the orb to the top of the tower where the spinning wheel was waiting for her. She hesitated under the enchantment, but eventually pricked her finger on the spinning wheel under Maleficent’s command. She fell immediately into a deep sleep, and like Snow White, now had no ability to protect or rescue herself from the sleeping curse. Instead, she had to lie in wait for Prince Phillip, her unknown love interest, to come and rescue her (Youngs 1999: 312; Whelan 2012: 24). Maegan Davis (2014) goes further with this, arguing that the ‘gifts’ of beauty, song, and the counter-curse (Aurora was originally sentenced to death upon pricking her finger on a spinning wheel, but the final gift was to break the curse with ‘true love’s kiss’) ‘only benefit Aurora as long as she finds her true love’ (49). This made Aurora a victim from the very outset, as she had no ability to help herself. Throughout the film, Aurora was either absent or under a sleeping curse (Davis 2014: 49; Whelan 2012: 24). Many decisions had been made for her, as she was used by her father as a political tool to unite two kingdoms. Without her presence at the palace, Aurora’s father, King Stefan, discussed and argued over Aurora’s future with Phillip’s father. She would be Queen and bear children to continue the royal lineage. Aurora had no say in the matter, and nor did she know what her duties would be (Mollet 2020: 38). Aurora was a victim of patriarchal traditions that dictated a woman’s role as a wife and mother (Mollet 2020: 38).

The image of women as victims was significant as it reinforced a harmful image of victimhood to audiences. This was achieved in two ways. Firstly, through the victimhood itself. Snow White, Cinderella, and Aurora were all victimized by the villain of the story, who was in all cases an older woman who had a great deal of agency, creating further tension. Although this could have been a plot point for the heroines to overcome, neither Snow White, Cinderella, nor Aurora were able to escape their victimhood as they did not have the agency to do so (Colombo and Muir 2020: 3). Both Snow White and Aurora were completely comatose and were physically unable to rescue themselves. Instead, they relied on others to rescue them (Colombo and Muir 2020: 3; Whelan 2012: 23, 24). Cinderella, although awake, was also unable to escape her victimhood alone, as she was unable to leave her locked tower. The plot for each film provided the princess with no means of breaking free of victimhood by herself, forcing her to rely on others (Colombo and Muir 2020: 3; Davis 2014: 49; Whelan 2012: 23, 24). Although relying on help and support from others is not a bad thing, men in this wave are not being portrayed in the same way. While many of the men in this wave of films are absent, they are active and never in need of help, so each princess' victimhood is set up in direct contrast to this creating a further dichotomy for the representation of femininity. As the image of the helpless victim could be traced through each of the first wave model films, it indicated that women were incapable of being able to rescue themselves.

Desiring romantic relationships

This model of femininity depicted women as desiring a romantic relationship, which was framed as an end goal and used as a reward. Snow White and Aurora desired romance from the onset of their films, whereas Cinderella only indicated a desire for a relationship at the end. Each princess was 'rewarded' with romance with a man.

Snow White immediately outlined her romantic desires at the beginning of her story (Maity 2014: 29), which then set the tone for her character development (Whelan 2012: 28). Audiences are 'bombarded with "happily-ever-after-messages" even from the first moments' (Clapp-Itnyre 2010: 9). Snow White's first words were: "I'm wishing for the one I love, to find me today. I'm hoping, and I'm dreaming of, the nice things he'll say". She sang this while conducting her scullery maid duties and stood over a wishing well hoping her wish would come true. A few minutes later it did, as a Prince travelling on horseback heard her singing and climbed over the castle wall to sing with her. At first, she was very shy and ran away, but sent a bird down to the Prince to give him a kiss. This image of femininity was reinforced throughout Snow White's storyline indicating the importance she placed

on a romantic relationship. Now that she had met the prince, she desired romance even more, as she explained to the seven dwarfs:

Snow White: Well once there was a princess.
Dwarf: Was the princess you?
Snow White: And she fell in love.
Dwarf: Was it hard to do?
Snow White: Oh it was very easy. Anyone could see that the Prince was charming, the only one for me.

The dwarfs were fascinated by Snow White's story, asking her questions about his appearance and what their interactions were like. The dwarfs, who did not indicate their own desire for a relationship, reinforced Snow White's desires by continually asking her about her dream romance. Snow White explained that "He was so romantic, I could not resist". For Snow White, this single interaction was enough for her to become invested in the chance of romance, even though as far as the audience was concerned, she did not know his name, how old he was, where he came from, or in fact any other personal information that would facilitate a decision about pursuing a courtship. Although she was without this information, Snow White desired not only a romantic relationship, but also the commitment of marriage:

Snow White: Someday my prince will come
Someday we'll meet again
And away to his castle we'll go
To be happy forever I know.
Someday when spring is here
We'll find our love anew
And the birds will sing
And wedding bells will ring
Some day when my dreams come true.

In fact, Snow White desired a romantic relationship and marriage so much so that she was willing to outwardly wish for it when the Evil Queen, disguised as the Old Hag, gifted her a magical wishing apple:

Evil Queen/Old Hag: There must be something your little heart desires. Perhaps there's someone you love.
Snow White: Well, there is someone.
Evil Queen/Old Hag: I thought so! I thought so! Old Granny knows a young girl's heart. Now, take the apple, dearie, and make a wish.
Snow White: I wish ... I wish ...

Evil Queen/Old Hag: That's it, go on! Go on.

[The scene cuts to the dwarfs rushing back to the cottage to rescue Snow White.]

Snow White: And that he will carry me away to his castle where we will live happily ever after.

It would seem Snow White was so focused on attaining a relationship with the Prince she had desired throughout the story, it was the first and only thing that came into her mind when thinking of a wish (Davis 2006: 184). Despite her awareness of the Evil Queen wanting to kill her, Snow White wished for her Prince, rather than her freedom (Davis 2006: 184). This implied the importance Snow White placed on a romantic relationship, prioritizing love over her own safety.

Snow White was poisoned by the apple and fell into a deep sleep. Although the dwarfs defeated the Evil Queen, Snow White remained lifeless—and we next saw her lying in a glass coffin, as she was ‘so beautiful, even in death, that the dwarfs could not find it in their hearts to bury her’. The narrator explained that the Prince had been searching for Snow White, heard of a girl sleeping in a glass coffin, and went to visit. He leant down to the sleeping Snow White and kissed her awake. The Prince kissing Snow White while she was asleep raises issues about consent. This is an intimate act performed by a man who barely knows Snow White. In a society where informed consent is still in public discourse, this is a concerning image for audiences to see. It has even been commented on by celebrities who have worked with Disney. Kristen Bell, the voice of *Frozen*’s Princess Anna, discusses the issue of consent with her children after reading them Snow White. She asks, “Don’t you think that it’s weird that the Prince kisses Snow White without her permission?” And then follows up with an explanation for her children, “Because you cannot kiss someone if they’re sleeping!” (Bever 2018: n.p.). Although Snow White’s wish did come true, it is important to recognize what this scene suggests. Throughout the film, she had desired a romantic relationship, and had made no attempt to seek one herself: the Prince found her at the beginning of the film, and he found her at the end (Ayles 2003: 40). Of course, she had been hiding from the Evil Queen, which could explain why she was not looking for the prince herself, nevertheless the only activity she had actively pursued was cleaning. As I have demonstrated in the previous section, Snow White had exhibited her passivity throughout the film through accepting her position of unpaid labour and eventual homelessness without resistance, as well as accepting the Huntsman trying to murder her. Despite her passivity, she was rewarded with a relationship, her only desire in the film.

A nuance in the first wave princesses was Cinderella. Although she did desire a relationship towards the end of the film, Cinderella spent most of

her story simply wanting to go to the palace ball. Continually having to perform unpaid domestic labour, Cinderella longed to go to the ball, her reason unclear, but she made no indication throughout the film that she had romantic intentions that could be fulfilled there. However, when she arrived and met an unknown man (Prince Charming), Cinderella's narrative changed. 'So this is Love' was a duet shared between Cinderella and Prince Charming, indicating that now they had met each other they understood what made life wonderful and this was the miracle that they had been dreaming of. For Cinderella, finding love with this man was what she had been dreaming of from the beginning of the film – but she had only just realized it. Of course, this romantic moment was interrupted when the clock struck midnight, and Cinderella realized her identity would be revealed. She ran away from the palace, but the Prince had claimed that he was in love with her and wanted to marry her. When Cinderella discovered the King's proclamation that the Prince would marry the woman whose foot fit her glass slipper, she realized she was the mysterious woman he was searching for. She went into an almost trance-like state, allowing her stepsisters to dump clothes onto her laid out arms while she stared dreamily into the distance. It was her humming of the waltz that she and the Prince danced to at the ball that gave her identity away to Lady Tremaine, resulting in her being locked in the tower. Like Snow White, Cinderella – when she *was* desirous of a romantic relationship – could not seem to think of anything else. This narrative shift indicated the new importance that Cinderella placed on her newfound romantic desire. After getting out of the tower thanks to her animal friends, Cinderella was rewarded for her passivity demonstrated in the film through a romantic relationship resulting in marriage. This was where Cinderella's story ended, suggesting that a relationship was the newfound end goal.

Like Snow White, Aurora demonstrated her desire for a romantic relationship at the beginning of her entrance in the film (Whelan 2012: 28). As she was sent on her birthday to pick berries in the forest, she sang:

I wonder, I wonder
 If my heart keeps singing
 Will my song go winging
 To someone who'll find me
 And bring back a love song to me?

Like Snow White, Aurora desired the romantic relationship but would not search for one herself. She would prefer to be 'found' by her love, and so she would simply wait for him. She continued to elaborate on her dreams of a man to her animal friends in the forest. She explained how she had met a Prince, who was "tall, and handsome and so romantic". She told

them that they would “walk together, and talk together, and just before we say goodbye, he takes me in his arms and then ... I wake up. Yes it’s only in my dreams. But they say if you dream a thing more than once, it’s sure to come true. And I’ve seen him so many times”. Aurora explained that these dreams were recurring, indicating that many of her subconscious and conscious thoughts were directly related to desiring a romantic relationship. Therefore, although she was initially shocked when Prince Phillip found her in the forest and they danced together, she was overjoyed that she seemed to have found her ‘prince’. Neither of them asked for the other’s identity, but Aurora did ask him to come to the cottage that evening. This was the only active role she played in fulfilling her romantic desires. She returned to the cottage to tell her three aunts her happy news, exclaiming: “This is the happiest day of my life. Everything’s so wonderful. Just wait till you meet him”. This statement cemented that she had her desires fulfilled, and this had brought her more joy than anything in her life. Of course, we had no concept of what Aurora’s life had been like for the past 16 years and therefore we had nothing to compare this moment to. But clearly, Aurora deemed this moment of finding love to be the pinnacle of her short life so far.

Aurora’s joy was short-lived, as when she was informed of her true identity and realized that she could not see the man from the forest again, she broke down in tears. She was told that she was betrothed to Prince Phillip, whom the audience knew to be the identity of the man from the forest, but Aurora did not. For the rest of her time in the film, before she fell under the sleeping curse, Aurora displayed her unhappiness at the situation she found herself in. As she walked to and through the palace to her safe room, she had her head bowed low. When Aunt Flora gave her a tiara as a final gift, Aurora broke down crying at the dressing table she was sitting at. This continuous display of unhappiness from Aurora indicated how miserable she was about being denied her love interest. At no point in the film did she ever indicate that she was upset because she had been lied to for 16 years, had her identity changed, and had been raised by people who were not her parents. At no point did Aurora question why any of this had happened, because she seemed to have focused all her attention on the fact that she could no longer see the man she met in the forest. Nor did she protest at the forced marriage she was destined for. Although it could be interpreted that she was upset that she now had to become a princess when Flora placed the tiara on Aurora’s head, I argue that as Aurora had indicated no emotion towards the changing of her identity, and the only vocalizations she made are about her being upset about not seeing her love interest as she had been betrothed to another man, that Aurora only displayed her unhappiness due to her desire for a romantic relationship. This inextricably links a woman’s ‘true’ happiness with romantic love (Garlen and Sandlin 2017: 959, 961) and normalizes forced marriage due to the complete lack of critique towards

it, especially as the boy in the forest was indeed Prince Phillip, which was then far more acceptable to Aurora.

Each of the first wave princesses clearly had strong desires for a romantic relationship except for Cinderella, who only displayed these desires towards the end of the film once she had met the prince. As the desire for a relationship was, or became, the sole motivation for each princess, it left little room for any further character development. Furthermore, although each princess desired a romantic relationship, they were passive in doing something to achieve what they wanted. With each princess dreaming of a romance, but simply waiting for their dream to come to them, I identify first wave princesses as ‘passive dreamers’: women who identified their dream but made no active attempt to achieve it. Their dreams were also often reduced to desiring a romantic relationship, suggesting this was their final goal in the narrative (Davis 2014: 49; Garlen and Sandlin 2017: 959, 961).

Conclusion

Those belonging to the first wave were distinguished as ‘passive dreamers’. Their storyline focused on them being in some form of danger (Snow White and Aurora) or abused (Snow White, Cinderella, and Aurora), but they had their agency removed, forced to rely on the agency of men to escape their environment. They passively accepted heavy household duties (Snow White and Cinderella) or newfound identities (Aurora). In the context of their bleak situations, their only dream was to have a romantic relationship. Yet their storyline would have the heroine wait for the prince to come to them, rather than having an active role in their own journey. The princess would also be in some form of danger that their prince would rescue them from. For the first wave, romance was their final goal, and their passivity was rewarded with their prince at the end of the film. As most of the plot revolved around romance in some way, it did not allow the first wave princesses to develop their character any further than desiring romance. The model ‘passive dreamers’ indicated the first wave princess’s inability to achieve their dreams by themselves, instead being rewarded for their passivity with their desire for a relationship.

These representations of femininity seemed to reflect the situation of women within the period each film was produced. It also ignored women of colour and centred whiteness, as each of the first wave princesses were white. Women of colour were not able to see themselves as a Disney Princess, as royal, or even as deserving of a happy ending. In this period, white women lacked agency, but would still be afforded more due to their race. The strong focus on domesticity was very similar to the lives that women were leading within this period. Only in unprecedented times such as war were women able to leave the household for a career, and that career would still involve gendered

tasks. It was made especially clear that women’s employment was temporary when they had to return to domestic life when American men returned from war. It cannot be a coincidence that three princess films that value and reward domesticity were released during a time that American women were being encouraged to return to the home (Genz 2009: 30; O’Brien 1996: 159–60). Even the focus on romantic relationships within the three films can mirror societal expectations for 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s women, as they were being encouraged to start families and raise their children. The emphasis on romantic relationships frames the goal and happiness of women, and their happily ever after is a romantic relationship (Garlen and Sandlin 2017: 959, 961). This is what women should aim for. Whelan (2014) argued that these three princess films in particular ‘neatly solidified Disney’s repackaging of the princess narrative, linking “princesshood” to contemporary concepts of ideal girlhood’ (172). The fact that Snow White, Cinderella, and Aurora’s passivity and domesticity was rewarded with the romantic relationship they craved demonstrated to audiences that this was the status quo: become a housewife and raise your children to be content. If it was good enough for Disney Princesses, then surely it was good enough for the American woman and beyond, see Table 1.1.

‘Lost Dreamers’: A Narrative Shift in the Princess Phenomenon

The second wave of princess films were released between 1985 and 1992. Between the release of *Sleeping Beauty* (1959) and *The Black Cauldron* (1985), the women’s rights movement had taken huge strides within areas of employment and the home. In 1960, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved the commercial production of the birth control pill, which gave women the autonomy to choose if and when they had children (May 2000: 513; Bailey 2004: 560). In 1962, homosexuality was decriminalized in Illinois, with many states following suit across the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. By 2003, homosexuality was completely decriminalized across all states through *Lawrence v Texas*. This did not however, mean that the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning/queer, intersex, asexual, pansexual, and allies (LGBTQ+) community no longer experienced discrimination or prejudice. In 1963, the Equal Pay Act was signed into law, prohibiting women being paid less for the same work as men because of their gender (Chafe 2000: 535–6). In 1968, this was extended to government contractors, as well as encouraging affirmative action to hire more women in the workplace (National Archives n.d.). In 1964, the Civil Rights Act was signed into law, preventing employment discrimination based on race, sex, and religion (National Archives n.d.). In 1965, the Immigration and Nationality Act was passed, enabling those outside of Western Europe to live in the US, leading to increased immigration from countries outside of Europe (History, Art & Archives n.d.a). The Indian Civil Rights Act was passed in 1968, providing American Indian citizens the same ‘protections’ under the Bill of Rights as other American citizens. However, this did cause controversy as it authorized ‘federal courts to intervene in intra-tribal disputes, a power they never had before’ (Pevar 1992 cited in Native Voices n.d.a). Years later in 1975, the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act was passed, providing Indian nations with the sovereignty to self-determine and ‘control their own affairs’ (Native Voices n.d.b). Within education,

federally supported programmes were prohibited from discriminating against applicants based on sex in 1972 (United States Department of Justice n.d.). In 1978, The Pregnancy Discrimination Act was passed, banning employers from discriminating against pregnant workers (US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC):n.d.). Although these laws were passed, it did not necessarily mean cultural discrimination and prejudice disappeared. Despite legislative progress, there were setbacks for the women's rights movement. In 1982, the Equal Rights Amendment, which granted women equal rights to men, failed to be ratified by congress (Equal Rights Amendment (ERA):n.d.). It is still not ratified to this day.

Within society, women's roles and opportunities changed. In 1963, Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique*, and three years later founded the National Organization for Women (NOW) to promote equal rights for women and societal change (Chafe 2000: 548). In 1965, Patsy Mink became the first woman of colour to be elected to Congress (History, Art & Archives n.d.b). She went on to promote and advocate for Asian Pacific Americans and women (History, Art & Archives n.d.b). In 1969, the state of California allowed mutually consensual divorce through the 'no fault' divorce law, and the Supreme Court granted unmarried couples the right to birth control in 1972 (Bailey 2004: 567). More women were being seen within public and private sector roles: Juanita Kreps became the first woman director of the New York Stock Exchange (1972); Paula Hawkins became the first woman senator elected who had not followed the footsteps of male family members (1980); Sandra Day O'Connor was the first woman judge to serve in the Supreme Court (1981); Sally Ride became the first American woman to enter space (1983); and Geraldine Ferraro was the first woman to be selected as a presidential running mate by a major political party (1984). Additionally, *Roe v Wade* (1973) became a political and legal landmark for women's rights when the Supreme Court declared that a woman's legal right to an abortion was protected by the US Constitution. This prevented unsafe abortions where women's lives were put at risk to abort their foetus secretly.¹ In 1981, state laws that gave husbands full control over property were overturned. Overall, by the time *The Black Cauldron* (1985) was released, women's rights and roles within society had drastically changed, with women being given more autonomy in the workplace and the home.

The Black Cauldron was one of Disney's unsuccessful releases, grossing \$21,288,692,² it is ranked forty-second on the 1985 Box Office List (Box Office Mojo n.d.d). In 1966, Walt Disney died, leaving his brother, Roy to take over the Disney Company, along with Donn Tatum and Card Walker to complete the management team (Wasko 2001a: 30). A few months after the opening of Walt Disney World, Roy O. Disney also passed away leaving Tatum and Walker as chairman and president respectively (Wasko 2001a: 30). However, at this point in its history, the Walt Disney Company had been

primarily focusing on real estate and recreation through expanding theme parks and trying (and failing) to create other resorts (Wasko 2001a: 30). Entertainment had been pushed aside. The management concerned with film production did not help matters. Roy Disney had appointed Ron Miller, Walt's son-in-law, as head of film production. The idea behind this being that Miller knew Walt and would therefore be likely to emulate Walt's choices (Davis 2006: 140). This was not the case, and Miller was unable to understand and make informed decisions based on the film market and consumer choices (Gomery 1994: 78). This was reflected by Disney films unsuccessful box office ratings with releases such as *The Apple Dumpling Gang* (1975) and *Something Wicked This Way Comes* (1983). Even the animation side of Disney, with releases such as *Robin Hood* (1973), *The Rescuers* (1977), and *The Fox and the Hound* (1981) did not reflect the previous box office successes (Clapp-Itnyre 2010: 11; Wasko 2001a: 30). Wasko has suggested that a reason for this could have been Disney's lack of movement with industry developments, instead trying to reproduce their previous successes, and turning down film proposals which went on to be hugely successful, such as *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981) and *ET: The Extra-Terrestrial* (1982) (Wasko 2001a: 30–1). In the early 1980s, 'Disney's share of the box office was less than 4 percent' (Wasko 2001a: 31; see also Davis 2006: 141). Disney's explanation for this, through the official fan site D23 Disney history was: 'Moviemaking was also changing in America in the early 1980s. Audiences were diminishing for the family films that had been the mainstay of the Company for many years, and Disney was not meeting the competition for films that attracted the huge teenage and adult market' (D23 n.d.).

In addition, there was an attempted takeover of Disney due to the perception that 'Disney stock was undervalued relative to the company's assets' (D23 n.d.). Corporate raiders who identified Disney's potential value began purchasing huge blocks of shares in a bid to take over the company, however, were prevented from going further by the Bass brothers, who purchased enough shares to own 'around 25 percent of the Disney stock, enough to control the company and to appoint their own managers' (Wasko 2001a: 32). The new owners appointed experienced industry professionals as the new management team: the new chief executive officer was former head of Paramount Michael Eisner, while the role of president went to former Warner Brother's vice chairman Frank Wells (Mollet 2020: 52). With new management putting multiple changes in place for the Walt Disney Company, Wasko commented that 'since the new ownership/management team took over in 1984, the Disney empire has extended its tentacles more widely and tenaciously than ever before' (2001: 33–3).

While tracing the relationship between princess films and women in society, Cassandra Stover commented that the 1980s was a time of backlash for feminism, resulting in 'post-feminist rhetoric in the guise of promoting

“new womanhood” (2013: 3). Disney’s new wave of princesses went from damsels in distress to heroines wanting adventure ‘with progressive qualities and character traits that corresponded completely to the increasingly acceptable gender roles in a society where women hold the same jobs as men’ (Stover 2013: 3). The release of *The Little Mermaid* in 1989 surged Disney Princess films back into the top ten, grossing \$84,355,863 (Box Office Mojo n.d.e). With the success of *The Little Mermaid*, Disney did not hesitate in producing another princess film. In 1991, *Beauty and the Beast* became the third-highest-grossing film, making \$248,802,521 (Box Office Mojo n.d.f). Disney’s success continued when their 1992 release, *Aladdin*, became the highest-grossing film with a worldwide gross of \$346,476,295 (Box Office Mojo n.d.g).

The 1980s and 1990s were another changing time for women. In 1986 the Supreme Court declared work environments could become hostile and abusive when there was sexual discrimination (Library of Congress 1985: 57). This allowed more scope for sexual harassment cases. In 1991, lawyer Anita Hill testified against Clarence Thomas (a Supreme Court nominee) for sexual harassment (Jacobs 2018), Thomas is a Supreme Court Judge to this day. A great number of women were elected to the House of Representatives and the Senate (United States Senate n.d.), including the first African American woman senator, Carol Moseley-Braun, elected in 1992 (Women of the Senate n.d.). However, there were still setbacks for women’s rights. Despite the *Roe v Wade* abortion ruling, the Supreme Court allowed states to control public funding for abortions and the ability of public hospitals to perform them (*Webster v Reproductive Health Services*: 1989). They allowed states to impose further restrictions on abortions by introducing elements such as waiting periods and parental consent in the case of minors (*Planned Parenthood v Casey*: 1992). Despite this, women had come a long way since the restricted employment and rights of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, which was perhaps reflected within the second wave princess films.

However, as Mollet argues, the post-feminist constructions of the princesses were exclusively for ‘the white, middle-class woman – a clear reflection of the profile of the Disney princess’ (2020: 50). And in society it was much the same, with President Bill Clinton remaining ‘very quiet on issues of race, abortion and class’ (Mollet 2020: 49). The second wave princesses, up until the introduction of Jasmine, were exclusively white. The lack of representation for women of colour is an issue that Disney is still grappling with, despite later waves including more diverse representation (but in problematic ways, as explained in later chapters). Until Jasmine, it had been made quite clear that these fairy tales were for and dominated by white people (Hurley 2005; Mollet 2020: 68), which Disney had been criticized for due to the lack of intersectionality in the princess line up (Mollet 2020: 108). Eve Benhamou (2014b) explained

through Valdivia's (2008) four stages of ethnic representation within the United States that 'multiculturalism had established itself as a major framework for analysing intergroup relations in the United States in the early 1990s', with films now 'celebrating racial and ethnic diversity' (156). People of colour were being cast in lead roles within mainstream cinema, and often becoming Hollywood icons (Benhamou 2014b: 156; Bogle 2003: 326). Both Valdivia (2008: 270) and Benhamou (2014b: 156) argue that it was at this point in cultural history that Disney also began to address representation within their films as a response to changes in Hollywood, mainstream cinema, and wider culture (Anjirbag 2018: 1). Therefore, the second wave princesses were the first to include a princess of colour, Jasmine of *Aladdin* (1992). The second wave princesses demonstrated a new type of princess, building on the shortcomings of the first, and finally including the first princess of colour after 65 years of princess films.

Second wave characteristics

Through textual analysis, I noted characteristics of each princess through their speech, movement, narrative, and plot lines. Eilonwy was depicted as assertive, kind, domestic, and as a leader. Other characters saw her as beautiful and in need of protection. Ariel developed the second wave further, being portrayed as assertive, active, rebellious, curious, eager to learn, adventurous, brave, and at times, passive. Like first wave princesses, Ariel also desired a romantic relationship. Other characters saw her as childlike, beautiful, someone to marry, rebellious, a political tool, a means to an end, and someone to look after. Belle demonstrated assertive, curious, adventurous, eager to learn, and brave traits. Like Ariel, she also desired a romantic relationship. Other characters viewed Belle as someone to look after, someone to marry, a love interest, rebellious, beautiful, odd, and different. Due to Belle's pivotal role in being the one to potentially break the curse the Beast was under; she was also seen as someone to break the curse as a means to an end. She was also abused by the Beast, however when he learnt the error of his ways, he encouraged Belle's interests by giving her his library of books and released her from his imprisonment so she can help her father. Jasmine was depicted as rebellious, assertive, curious, adventurous, brave, astute, yet still desiring a romantic relationship. Other characters in *Aladdin* saw Jasmine as beautiful, as a love interest, someone to marry, someone to look after and someone to respect. Due to her assertive nature, the film's villain, Jafar, saw Jasmine as a 'shrew' who was interfering with his plans.

In total, I identified 29 characteristics across the four films. Eilonwy was an anomaly, only sharing one characteristic with the other second wave

princesses (assertiveness). A non-franchised princess (she is not recognized as an official princess in merchandising or the parks), I decided that based on her traits of leadership and assertiveness she would remain within the second wave but would be discussed separately. Ariel, Belle, and Jasmine all shared four characteristics: assertive, rebellious, brave, and desiring a romantic relationship. This demonstrated a significant change from the first wave characteristics, distinguishing them from their predecessors.

Princess Eilonwy

Although this chapter is dedicated to exploring images of femininity in second wave princesses, I want to dedicate a section to discuss the anomaly of Princess Eilonwy. Like in any research, anomalies can occur during analysis. Eilonwy was difficult to place, on the one hand, she demonstrated some domestic qualities and her 'happily ever after' seemed to involve a romantic relationship with Taran, the film's hero, reminiscent of first wave princesses produced 26 years earlier. On the other, Eilonwy was confident and demonstrated leadership qualities lacking in second wave princesses. *The Black Cauldron* did not develop Eilonwy in the way Disney had done with other princesses. She was a supporting character to Taran and his journey to become a hero. The story was not centred around her, her life, or her development (unlike the other second wave princesses, even Jasmine, who could also be deemed as a supporting character to Aladdin in his eponymous film, received a more developed plot line and narrative). Nevertheless, she was 'strong, feisty, wilful, adventurous, and independent' (Davis 2006: 157). Based on Eilonwy's images of confidence and leadership, she sits within the second wave princesses. I argue that even within this wave, she was different to Ariel, Belle, and Jasmine. Eilonwy produced two prominent images distinct from the second wave: confidence and leadership, whereas Ariel, Belle, and Jasmine displayed images of assertiveness, rebelliousness, and bravery. In this part of the chapter I will discuss Princess Eilonwy as an anomaly to both the first and second wave.

Princess Eilonwy demonstrated confidence and leadership in her first scene in *The Black Cauldron* (1985). Held captive by the Horned King, Eilonwy found the story's hero, Taran by following his voice through the dungeon. After their introductions (with Eilonwy introducing herself as a princess, and Taran introducing himself as a pig keeper) she sighed:

Eilonwy:	I was so hoping for someone who could help me escape!
	Oh well, if you want to come with me, you may.
Taran:	Can I?
Eilonwy:	Well yes, I said you could.

Eilonwy's intentions were to find someone to help her escape, demonstrating her active intent to escape the dungeon, rather than waiting for someone to find her (Davis 2006: 158). When Taran revealed himself as a pig keeper, she realized he may not be able to help her but suggested he may accompany her, which also highlights the class dynamics between Eilonwy (a princess) and Taran (a pig keeper) as she presumes from his trade that he will not be able to help her. However, this confident and active wording demonstrated Eilonwy's position as a leader within the film, she is not looking for someone to save her. She continued to demonstrate confidence in the scene as she guided him through the castle, stating "Well, you better stay close to me or you'll get lost" and, "Well come on then, help me look around" (Davis 2006: 158). Eilonwy was clear and focused, and instructed and delegated tasks to Taran. This assertive and confident attitude certainly differed from the first wave princesses.

Even when Taran assumed she was unsafe by herself, Eilonwy's assertiveness and confidence did not falter. For example, when Eilonwy and Taran were separated while trying to escape the castle, Taran attempted to take the role of protecting Eilonwy:

Eilonwy: Are you alright?
 [Taran is swinging his newly acquired magic sword, pleased he has scared off one of the henchmen.]
 Taran: Oh good, you're safe.
 Eilonwy: [Holds her arms out] Why, of course. I –
 Taran: Come on. [Takes Eilonwy's hand] I'm going to get you out of here.

Despite Taran viewing her as someone in need of protection, Eilonwy believed she was perfectly capable of looking after herself. However, as Taran had a newfound confidence due to finding an enchanted sword, he pulled Eilonwy through the castle looking for an escape. Unlike Eilonwy, Taran's confidence wavered under pressure as they were surrounded by henchmen:

Henchmen: We've got you now pig boy!
 [The henchmen begin to throw weapons such as axes and spears at the two prisoners.]
 Eilonwy: Taran, do something! [Avoiding weapons, as Taran's face grows with panic and fear] Use the sword!
 [Taran slams the sword against the castle gate chains, causing the gate to open.]

Eilonwy was able to jolt Taran out of panic to escape the Horned King's castle, demonstrating confidence and leadership qualities, even under pressure

(Davis 2006: 158). She continued to demonstrate her confidence when Taran attempted to take credit for their escape:

Taran: Well, I got us out of the castle didn't I?
Eilonwy: You? I'd say it was the sword's magic.
Taran: But it takes a great warrior to handle a sword like this!
Eilonwy: But, still, it is a magic sword.
Taran: What does a *girl* know about swords anyway.
Eilonwy: Girl? Girl? If it weren't for this *girl*, you would still be in the Horned King's dungeon!

Eilonwy immediately challenged Taran in a respectful manner, and her confidence did not falter even when Taran continued to insist the rescue was down to him and questioned her knowledge due to her gender to support his argument. Eilonwy refused to accept Taran's comments and defended herself by exclaiming, "Girl? Girl? If it weren't for this *girl*, you would still be in the Horned King's dungeon!". This was a stark contrast between Eilonwy's representation in *The Black Cauldron*, and the first wave princesses. Although Eilonwy was shown to perform a domestic task (mending Fflewddur's trousers), she was also incredibly confident, resourceful, and assertive.

Assertive

Every princess demonstrated assertiveness throughout each film, a stark contrast to the passive images found within the first wave. The APA defined assertiveness as, 'an adaptive style of communication in which individuals express their feelings and needs directly, while maintaining respect for others' (APA n.d.d). I define 'assertiveness' as being a confident individual able to clearly and effectively stand up for themselves and others. Through assertiveness, second wave princesses demonstrated their belief in themselves, their values; and did not allow others to doubt their skills. I discuss the images of assertiveness produced by Belle and Jasmine. Ariel's assertiveness was often framed as 'rebellious', perhaps demonstrating her deviance more than other princesses.

Belle's assertive nature emerged at many points in *Beauty and the Beast* (England et al 2011: 564), specifically with her communication with Gaston and the Beast. Belle was considered as 'odd' and 'different' to her fellow villagers. Despite this, the film's villain Gaston believed 'she's the most beautiful girl in town' and pursued her throughout the film. Belle regularly rejected and corrected Gaston, demonstrating her assertive nature. It also implied a shift in princesses not being romantically interested in the first man they met (Davis 2014: 50). The audience saw this at the beginning of the

film, where Gaston's friend Le Fou mocked Maurice. She responded with "Don't talk about my father that way!". The audience could immediately see Belle would stand up to men when she believed they were in the wrong. This was also demonstrated when Belle made the choice to return the injured Beast to his castle:

Belle: [*Wringing a cloth in hot water*] [*Gentle voice*] Here now, [*the Beast is licking his wounds*] oh don't do that [*he growls, and his servants back away, obviously frightened*], just hold still [*he keeps moving his arm away from Belle and the hot cloth, but she manages to place it onto his injured arm*].

[*The Beast roars with pain and the servants rush away, scared.*]

Beast: [*Shouts in Belle's face*] That hurts!

Belle: [*Shouts in the Beast's face*] If you'd hold still it wouldn't hurt as much!

Beast: Well if you hadn't have run away, this wouldn't have happened.

Belle: [*Still shouting*] If you hadn't frightened me I wouldn't have ran away!

[*The Beast goes to shout in Belle's face again but realizes he has no rebuttal, he thinks for a moment.*]

Beast: [*Raising his voice*] Well you shouldn't have been in the West Wing!

Belle: Well you should learn to control your temper.

[*The Beast slumps in the chair, placing his cheek on his paw, realizing he has lost the argument.*]

Belle stood up to the Beast despite his shouting: she did not allow him to intimidate her into submission and held her ground within the argument (Mollet 2020: 65). The Beast had already shouted and roared at Belle twice, firstly when demanding she ate with him, and secondly when he found her trespassing in the West Wing. For a third time, the Beast berated her even for doing something that was in his benefit – caring for him. He also tried to blame his behaviour and his wounds on Belle, suggesting that because she ran away from the castle she was to blame for his wounds and for him shouting at her. Although a first wave princess may have been too scared to speak at all or would have silently agreed with the Beast; Belle refused to accept his claims (Hoerrner 1996: 223). Instead of retreating or agreeing, Belle shouted back and invaded the Beast's personal space in the way that he did to her. The Beast was much larger than Belle, so this reversal of invasion of space looked quite stark. It caught the Beast off guard as at first, he had no response, and when he did try to catch her out, she already had another comeback, suggesting that he should control his temper. That level of assertiveness was not seen in any other second wave princess film. Belle's

quick-witted comments and her refusal to be intimidated demonstrated her self-confidence.

Belle's assertiveness could also be seen explicitly at the end of the film. She rejected Gaston's marriage proposal at the beginning, so at its end Gaston decided to use Belle's father's claims about the Beast to place him into a psychiatric unit to force her into marrying him:

Gaston: I might be able to clear up this little misunderstanding, if ...
Belle: If what?
Gaston: If you marry me.
Belle: What?
Gaston: One little word Belle – that's all it takes. [*He encroaches her space*]
Belle: Never! [*She pushes Gaston's face away from hers*]

Again, Belle was faced with an opportunity to free her father at the expense of her own happiness, but this time she refused to take it. Here Gaston had created a situation for him to envision Belle as a 'damsel in distress', a role often played by first wave princesses. However, Belle bluntly refused Gaston's blackmail, and her prescribed damsel-like role. Before, she would have politely rejected Gaston, now she forcefully did so, pushing him away.

Belle then dealt with the situation herself using the enchanted mirror to show everyone the Beast, proving her father's claims. However, Gaston used Belle's proof to lead an angry mob to kill the Beast:

Gaston: [*Takes Belle by the shoulders*] If I didn't know better, I'd think you have feelings for this monster.
Belle: [*Pulls herself away from his grip*] He's no monster Gaston, you are!

The audience could see that Belle would stand up for others through this action (Davis 2014: 50). Belle knew the Beast was real and wanted to defend her father when people were questioning his sanity. When Gaston tried to rally the villagers and incite them to think the Beast was a monster, the audience finally saw Belle unapologetically confront Gaston – something that no one else in the film had dared to do (other women in the town were regularly seen fawning over him, with Belle as the only exception). Belle held up a metaphorical mirror to Gaston when she told him, "He's no monster Gaston, you are!", and while Gaston was too vain and arrogant to believe or listen, the audience was able to see a heroine continue to stand up for her beliefs and defy villainous bullies.

As Gaston began to lead the villagers to kill the Beast, Belle once again tried to stop him, saying, "No! I won't let you do this!". However,

her efforts were in vain as she and her father were locked in their own basement so they couldn't warn the Beast. Although they managed to escape thanks to Chip, the enchanted teacup, Belle contributed very little to saving the Beast when she arrived at the castle. Rather than take an active role, she seemed to be positioned as the ray of hope for the Beast in the plotline. When Gaston finally reached the castle, he immediately found and tried to kill the Beast. Having lost hope, the Beast refused to fight back for his life until he heard Belle's cry of "No! No Gaston don't!". Seeing that Belle had returned appeared to give the Beast the strength to fight back (Sumera 2008: 43). Belle made her way into the castle and to the balcony where the Beast had seemingly won his fight. She helped him onto the balcony, but Gaston returned and fatally stabbed the Beast. Although Belle demonstrated assertiveness in her interactions with individuals, it appeared there was a glass ceiling. It was significant how Belle was never portrayed as committing an act of violence, even for the sake of someone's life. But it was acceptable for the Beast to be violent within the same scene. Although Belle was assertive, in this scene the image of femininity was that of a peaceful woman, not a warrior. It implies that Belle can only be assertive to an extent, and that a woman committing a violent act (even for the right reasons, as violence is not always necessary) would be transgressing the image of femininity too much. Nevertheless, moving away from passivity, Belle's assertiveness was an image of femininity within the second wave princesses, which was also evident in Jasmine of *Aladdin*.

Despite being forced to marry before her next birthday, Jasmine's assertive nature was seen throughout *Aladdin* (England et al 2011: 564): 'Disney animator and creator of Jasmine Mark Henn says of his character: 'Jasmine is very different from the rest [of the group of recent heroines]; a lot more feisty than Belle (from *Beauty and the Beast*), and not as naive as Ariel (from *The Little Mermaid*)' (Staninger 2003: 67).

Her assertiveness was demonstrated through the way she spoke with other men. Jasmine did not shy away from communicating her thoughts and feelings. This was particularly demonstrated when she was led to believe that Jafar had Aladdin 'killed' for 'kidnapping her' (Jafar had sent Aladdin to the Cave of Wonders). Jasmine shared her newfound knowledge with her father, the Sultan of Agrabah. When the Sultan addressed the issue with Jafar and he apologized, she stated "At least some good will come of my being forced to marry. When I am queen, I will have the power to get rid of you". Jasmine was clearly aware of the little power she currently had and knew that she could use her forced marriage to her advantage and exert her independence freely.

Despite being constrained in her life, she regularly demonstrated her desire for independence through her assertive nature. When Aladdin – disguised

as Prince Ali – arrived at the castle, he discussed his future with the Sultan and Jafar:

Sultan: Jasmine will like this one.

[Jasmine enters the room unnoticed.]

Aladdin: And I'm pretty sure I'll like Princess Jasmine.

Jafar: Your Highness, no. I must intercede on Jasmine's behalf. This boy is no different from the others. *[Jasmine narrows her eyebrows]* What makes him think he is worthy of the princess?

Aladdin: Your majesty, I am Prince Ali Aliababwa. Just let her meet me. I will win your daughter.

Jasmine: *[Furious]* How dare you? All of you.

[The three men look very uncomfortable.]

Jasmine: Standing around deciding my future? I am not a prize to be won!

Jasmine refused to be spoken about, and have her future decided by three men. She not only chastised them for making assumptions over who she would and wouldn't like, but for deciding her future as a wife without her presence or permission. Despite the Sultan, Jafar and Aladdin stripping Jasmine of her autonomy when it came to her marriage, she retrieved it and made it very clear that they should not have this discussion again. Jasmine declaring "I am not a prize to be won!" highlighted the way that she had been objectified by her own father, a potential suitor, and a senior staff member at the palace, and her rejection of that objectification. Her words and actions in this scene demonstrated her assertive nature, which was then continued when Aladdin – disguised as Prince Ali – attempted to rectify the situation by climbing onto her balcony. She clearly and assertively rejected his attempts, stating, "I do not want to see you" and "Just leave me alone!". She was not interested in speaking to him, until she noticed something familiar about his appearance. Aladdin tried to put her off when she told him he reminded her of someone she met in the marketplace, telling her "I have servants who go to the marketplace for me". To try and rectify his errors, the Genie helped Aladdin try to talk about Jasmine, however he focused on her appearance rather than her personality. Jasmine realized this was an opportunity to trick Aladdin:

Jasmine: Mm ... I'm rich too you know.

Aladdin: Yeah.

[Jasmine slinks over to him, swaying her hips and arms.]

Jasmine: The daughter of a Sultan.

Aladdin: I know.

Jasmine: A fine prize for any prince to marry.
 Aladdin: [*Looks nervous*] Right. Right! A prince like me.
 Genie: Warning. Warning.
 Jasmine: [*Places her hands on Aladdin's chest*] Right. [*Boops him with her finger*] A prince like you. [*Pulls on the plume of his headpiece*] And every other stuffed shirt swaggering peacock I've ever met. [*Pulls his cloak over his face and walks off*]

Once again, Aladdin focused on her appearance and tried to persuade her that he was the one for her. And once again, Jasmine refused to accept his claims and put him back in his place by actively undermining him. Through this Jasmine not only demonstrated her assertiveness, but she also implied that she was unimpressed by compliments, wealth, and status. However, when Aladdin accidentally revealed he had a magic carpet, Jasmine was curious and asked if it was safe. When Aladdin replied with “do you trust me?”, she realized Prince Ali was in fact Aladdin, the boy she met at the marketplace. After they had ridden on the carpet, she tricked him into revealing his identity and then confronted him and held him accountable for his actions. Her question “Did you think I was stupid? That I wouldn’t figure it out?” suggested people had underestimated Jasmine before, and she found it irritating. Her behaviour and speech in this scene demonstrated assertiveness through her methods of confrontation and holding Aladdin accountable for his actions.

Both Belle and Jasmine presented images of assertiveness throughout their films. This assertiveness demonstrated a new self-confident and strong-minded model of femininity which was a stark contrast to the passivity and docile nature of the first wave princesses. Unlike their predecessors, Belle and Jasmine actively held others to account for their actions, stood up for themselves and others in situations where they were being objectified and mistreated, and exuded confidence in themselves and their abilities. These assertive images were presented throughout each film and produced a strong heroine. This was continued through the next image of femininity found within the second wave princess films: rebelliousness and bravery.

Rebellious and brave

Another image of femininity produced by second wave princesses was rebelliousness and bravery. Typically, a rebellious nature is one that will seek to defy authority and control. Through rebellion, second wave princesses made their own choices within a patriarchal structure. It was through rebellion that they made attempts to free themselves of the confines of patriarchal society. Although the princesses did achieve this,

I will later discuss how their 'freedom' was often replaced with another kind of patriarchy (desiring a romantic relationship with a man) to the point that their 'happy ending' was now their relationship as opposed to their original desires (Garlen and Sandlin 2017: 959, 961, 963). Although desiring a romantic heterosexual relationship is not in itself patriarchal, the narrative change experienced by the second wave princesses benefits patriarchal structure. I consider bravery as courageous acts or behaviour completed by an individual. Through bravery, the second wave princesses demonstrated their active and, in some cases, fearless nature to follow their dreams and desires. Often, the princesses demonstrated rebelliousness and bravery in the same sequences.

Ariel began *The Little Mermaid* with an act of rebellion and bravery (Sells 1995: 179). The first time we saw her, the audience realized she had missed her singing recital in front of the whole kingdom to search a shipwreck for human treasures. Ariel explored the shipwreck with her best friend, Flounder, and collected the human treasures she found. However, a nearby shark sensed their whereabouts and Ariel and Flounder began swimming for their lives. In the process, Ariel dropped her bag, and when she evaded the shark, she went back and found it, not wanting to lose the human treasure. Ariel not only retrieved her bag, but she also protected Flounder and herself from the shark by trapping it. Flounder's anxiety and fear was directly contrasted with Ariel's bravery.

When she realized she had forgotten the recital, she returned home and was scolded by her father, King Triton. He exclaimed, "Ariel, how many times must we go through this?", suggesting this was not the first time Ariel had disobeyed her father (Bendix 1993: 286). Because of her rebellious nature, King Triton decided 'Ariel needs constant supervision' and appointed Sebastian, his trusted advisor to 'watch over her, to keep her out of trouble'. Sebastian was less than pleased with his new role as he despaired of Ariel, calling her a 'headstrong teenager'. It was clear from the way Ariel was introduced, and the way others discuss Ariel that she had a rebellious nature (Mollet 2020: 57). This was emphasized when Ariel continued to go to the ocean's surface, despite it being forbidden.

These characteristics were demonstrated further when she disobeyed her father's commands when she followed the sounds of a ship. Ariel saw Prince Eric for the first time and was infatuated with him. When Eric's ship was struck by lightning and set on fire, Eric returned for his dog, Max. Ariel saw Eric rescue Max but then remain trapped on the ship himself. Seeing him unconscious, Ariel raced to rescue Eric from drowning and returned him to the beach (Zarranz 2007: 56). This was one of the bravest acts carried out by a princess within the phenomenon: saving the life of another. Here, Ariel's rebellion and bravery went hand in hand. She was banned from going to the ocean's surface, banned from being

near humans, yet she ignored her father's demands and watched the ship, rescued a human, and even took him back to shore (which threatened her own safety). For Ariel, this act of bravery was the ultimate act of rebellion against her father. Although King Triton wanted Ariel to stay below the surface for what seemed to be safety reasons, Ariel's curiosity got the better of her and she continually disobeyed her father. However, as I will discuss later, once Ariel set her eyes on Eric, her curiosity about the human world seemed to disappear and was completely replaced by her desire for a romantic relationship.

Ariel's final act of rebellion was to visit Ursula, the sea witch. This act, unlike the others, was fuelled by her desire to meet Prince Eric. She knew her father would not allow her to go to the surface, he had destroyed her cavern of human treasure, so she resorted to dark magic. Ariel stripped herself of her autonomy, willingly giving up her voice in exchange for a pair of human legs to have access to the human world, Eric's world (Maity 2014: 30). Laura Sells (1995) commented on this act, arguing that: 'Like so many women who enter "the workforce" or any other "male sphere", Ariel wrestles with the double-binding cultural expectations of choosing between either voice or access, but never both' (179). Her final rebellious act was the one that silenced her rebellious nature as she was now reliant on Eric, a man she had never had a conversation with, to save her and her voice (Maity 2014: 30). From this moment on, Ariel's acts of rebellion and bravery diminished until she defended her father at the end of the film.

Ariel was given three days to win Prince Eric's heart and receive true love's first kiss. But, without a voice Ariel was unable to reveal her identity, Eric was enchanted by Ursula, and did not realize Ariel was the girl who rescued him until it was too late. Ariel was returned to her mermaid form and taken back down to the ocean by Ursula to be her slave. King Triton realized what Ariel had done and tried to destroy the contract to free his daughter, but it was legally binding. King Triton then decided to trade his freedom for his daughter's. Ariel's final act of bravery was in reaction to her father becoming imprisoned:

Ariel: You! You monster!

[*Ariel attacks Ursula, but Ursula overpowers Ariel and throws her against a rock.*]

Ursula: Don't fool with me, ya little brat! Contract or no I'll – ah!

[*Eric has thrown a harpoon at Ursula, hurting her arm.*]

Ariel: Eric!

Ursula: Why you little fool!

Ariel: [*Ursula holds Ariel down with her tentacles*] Eric look out!

[*Ariel wrestles with Ursula for the trident.*]

Ursula: [*To Flotsam and Jetsam*] After him!

[*Flotsam and Jetsam chase Eric and trap him with their tails, pulling him back down to the ocean.*]

Sebastian: Come on! [*He and Flounder try to disarm the eels to free Eric, they release him, but Eric seems to be unconscious*]

Ursula: Say goodbye to your sweetheart.

[*Ursula aims the trident at Eric, but Ariel pulls Ursula's hair so hard it pulls her entire body, changing the direction of the trident's spell, killing Flotsam and Jetsam.*]

Ariel had once again saved Eric's life. After this, Ariel became reliant on Prince Eric to save her as she was left helpless at the bottom of the ocean (Towbin et al 2004: 31). Although Ariel and Eric were able to overcome Ursula together (Mollet 2020: 59), it was Prince Eric who delivered the fatal blow, defeating Ursula and saving them all. Like Belle, although Ariel displayed characteristics of rebelliousness and bravery, the audience never saw Ariel commit an act of violence in the way men in the film did (Hoerrner 1996: 220). Belle had to watch while the Beast and Gaston fought. Ariel was trapped in a whirlpool at the bottom of the ocean, watching and waiting for Eric to deliver the fatal blow to Ursula. The nearest thing to an act of violence that Ariel committed was the second-hand killing of Flotsam and Jetsam. I use the term 'second-hand killing' as she merely needed to change the direction of the trident being wielded by Ursula. Ariel did not at any point have any control over the trident itself, nor the forethought to intentionally harm Flotsam and Jetsam, she merely pulled on Ursula's hair to move the blow away from Eric. Like Belle, Ariel was confined to non-violent acts of bravery and rebellion. This produces the idea that women cannot and should not commit acts of violence, even if it is to protect others.³ It also highlighted the limits that seemed to be placed on the second wave princesses, they could be rebellious and brave, but not *too* rebellious and brave. They could sacrifice their life or their freedom to rescue *others*, but not *themselves*.

Belle often carried out acts of bravery for men, rather than for herself. The audience first saw Belle's bravery when she asked to take her father's place as the Beast's prisoner (Craven 2002: 125; Cummins 1995: 25; Davis 2006: 190, 193). Belle lived with her father, Maurice, an inventor. He finally perfected a wood chopping machine and took it to a fair but got lost on the way. Seeking refuge in the Beast's castle, the Beast took him in as a prisoner for trespassing. Back at the village, Belle saw Maurice's horse, Phillippe, without her father and realized he was missing. She immediately straddled Phillippe and allowed him to take her to where her father was last seen. She entered the castle and looked for her father, and when the Beast roared with anger that she had trespassed, she offered to take his place (Davis 2014: 50). Like Ariel, Belle sacrificed her own autonomy for that

of another man, placing his needs above her own (Davis 2006: 193, 194; Downey 1996: 195; Gray 1992: 160; Henke et al 1996: 238; Manley 2003: 81).

Despite making the decision autonomously, Belle was upset at the thought of being a prisoner for the rest of her life. The Beast on the other hand knew that Belle was an opportunity for him to break the curse he was under. Belle was thus framed as a means to an end, a way for the Beast to break the curse (Cummins 1995: 24):

Mrs Potts: The girl has lost her father and her freedom all in one day.
 Lumiere: Master, have you thought that perhaps this girl could be the one to break the spell?
 Beast: Of course I have! I'm not a fool.
 Lumiere: Good! So, you fall in love with her, she falls in love with you, and poof! The spell is broken. We'll be human again by midnight.

The Beast and his servants decided the best way to proceed with breaking the curse was to allow Belle to use the castle as her home, rather than force her to be a prisoner. This demonstrates how Belle, and her subsequent treatment is used as a means to an end to free others, not because Belle *should* be treated humanely. This brought out Belle's rebellious nature, especially when she had just arrived and was still upset:

Beast: I told you to come down to dinner!
 Belle: I'm not hungry!
 Beast: You'll come out or I'll ... I'll ... I'll break down the door!
 Lumiere: Master, I could be wrong but that may not be the best way to win the girls affections.
 Cogsworth: Please attempt to be a gentleman.
 Beast: [*Exasperated*] But she is being so difficult.
 Mrs Potts: Gently, gently.
 Beast: Will you come down to dinner?
 Belle: No!
 [*The Beast points at the door to prove his point.*]
 Cogsworth: [*Calming the Beast down*] Ah, ah. Suave, genteel.
 Beast: [*Through gritted teeth*] It would give me great pleasure if you would join me for dinner.
 Cogsworth: And we say please.
 Beast: [*Through gritted teeth*] Please.
 Belle: No thank you.
 Beast: You can't stay in there forever!
 Belle: Yes I can!

Beast: Fine! Then go ahead and starve! [*To the servants*] If she doesn’t eat with me, then she doesn’t eat at all!

There were two things to note here. Firstly, the Beasts’ servants were clearly afraid of their master’s temper, often skirting round telling him when he was in the wrong and trying to guide him gently in a more appropriate direction rather than telling him he was being rude or abusive. They had clearly conformed to their way of life in the castle. Secondly, Belle refused to conform to the Beast’s authority and rejected his verbal and emotional abuse, despite being a prisoner, which was in itself a rebellious act. Belle refused to dine with the very person who imprisoned her father – and herself – for trespassing, producing the image of femininity as refusing to conform, or be forced to do something that an individual didn’t want to do (Mollet 2020: 65). The image of rebellion produced connotations of a strong-willed femininity the first wave princesses did not have. Snow White, Cinderella, and Aurora were docile, always doing as they were told and following instructions. The second wave princesses, on the other hand, rebelled against their (male) counterparts and refused to follow orders.

Belle’s rebellious nature developed further when she left her room in search of food. After eating with Lumiere, Cogsworth, and Mrs Potts, Belle wished to explore the castle and was reminded she could explore every single room – apart from the West Wing. Belle ignored this and went to the West Wing to explore (Sumera 2008: 44). The Beast found her with the enchanted rose that indicates the time left until his curse will be irreversible and was furious. He screamed at her, roared at her, invaded her personal space, and threw objects around the room. The Beast yelled for her to “get out” and, visibly scared, Belle ran from the West Wing and decided to leave, telling the servants: “Promise or no promise, I can’t stay here another minute”. Once again, Belle rebelled against the rules of her imprisonment, which then led her to break her promise to the Beast. However, this is an empowering moment for Belle, she will not tolerate his behaviour and will protect herself from it. The way Belle’s rebellion was dealt with by the Beast was very poor. Of course, breaking rules does have consequences, but it should not result in verbal and physical abuse. This image of Belle’s rebellion could suggest that if women rebel, they should expect abuse as a punishment. Although Belle initially left, when the Beast followed her and was able to rescue her from wolves, she returned with him to the castle. However, I will discuss this later in the chapter. Despite Belle returning, she still demonstrated a rebellious nature throughout the film.

Princess Jasmine also demonstrated rebellion and bravery throughout *Aladdin*. She was three days away from her birthday and had to be married

before it. She had turned away every suitor that had come to court her, as she did not believe in being forced to marry. As her birthday drew closer, Jasmine ran away from the palace, telling her trusted pet tiger Rajah “I’m sorry Rajah. But I can’t stay here and have my life lived for me”. It was rebellious to reject all suitors in the first place, but to run away from the palace to start a new life was a complete rejection of her status as a princess. It was also brave for Jasmine to leave the only life she had ever known, one that was making her miserable because it was restricting her freedom, to build a better one for herself. Of course, she took no money, belongings, nor did she have anywhere to go. This was naive of Jasmine, however her bravery to rebel against her royal status was something no princess had done before. First wave princesses were unhappy and wanted to leave their current living conditions (or in Aurora’s case, a future that was set out for her without her knowledge), but none considered doing anything about it, they merely accepted their fate. Even Ariel and Belle had to be prompted before acting on their wishes, for Ariel it was seeing Prince Eric and her desire for a romantic relationship; for Belle it was the Beast emotionally and verbally abusing her that made her leave, but when he saved her from the wolves on her journey home she returned to the castle. Here, Jasmine made an autonomous choice to leave her current life and start a new one. Although, the audience later saw that she was not as prepared for that life as she thought.⁴

The audience could also observe acts of rebellion from Jasmine through her interactions with Jafar, the royal vizier. After Jasmine had returned to the palace and met Aladdin (disguised as Prince Ali), she was happy with her choice. However, Jafar had hypnotized the Sultan to force her to marry him:

Jafar: You’re speechless I see. A fine quality in a wife.
[Jafar takes Jasmine’s hand and puts his face very close to hers.]
 Jasmine: I will never marry you! *[Jasmine rips her hand away from Jafar, narrowing her eyebrows]* Father, I choose Prince Ali.

Jasmine rejected Jafar’s advances and rebelled against her father’s choice. Jasmine made her feelings of disdain towards Jafar very clear throughout the film and was disgusted at the thought of marrying him. She clearly rejected the proposal of marriage and refused to accept her fate as sealed. This was continued when Jafar managed to get hold of the Genie’s lamp and made himself Sultan of Agrabah. He exclaimed that now he was Sultan, Jasmine and her father would bow to him, to which she retorted, “We will never bow to you”. Jafar realized he could only force Jasmine to do as he bided through magic, so he chained her up and forced her to feed him. Still, he tried to convince her to marry him:

Jafar: A beautiful desert bloom such as yourself should be on the arm of the most powerful man in the world. [*He conjures a tiara*]
What do you say my dear? Why with you as my Queen ...
[*Jasmine reaches for a glass with a drink in it.*]
Jasmine: [*Throws the drink in his face*] Never!

Jasmine made it clear she would never conform to Jafar's wishes and would continually rebel against him. The only exception to her behaviour was when she deliberately pretended to be in love with Jafar after he wished for Jasmine to fall in love with him. Having seen her chance, Jasmine played along despite the Genie attempting to explain that he could not make people fall in love. Jasmine's quick thinking gave Aladdin time to get closer to the lamp, although Jafar ultimately caught him and threw Jasmine into a time turner filled with sand. Nevertheless, Jasmine's rebellious nature was clearly articulated throughout *Aladdin*. As demonstrated previously, she refused to partake in anything she didn't want to and refused to be controlled by others. This produced the image of a headstrong woman who wanted to control her own life and would use whatever limited autonomy she had to do so.

Overall, second wave princesses continually performed acts of rebellion *in spite of* men and acts of bravery *for* men. However, it is important to note that despite the continual link with men, the second wave princesses were a far cry away from simply hoping that someone (most likely a man) will come and rescue them. First wave princesses never even *thought* to rebel, let alone do it. For example, Snow White had to be *told* by the man who was ordered to murder her to run away, she did not even think to do so herself. Cinderella, once her dress had been ruined by her stepsisters cried until she was put in a pumpkin carriage and taken to the ball. Aurora did not even think to question her lineage and royal status, and though the thought of her new life made her miserable, made no attempt to rebel against it. The progression from passive victims to assertive and rebellious heroines demonstrated the changes that Disney made to develop Ariel, Belle, and Jasmine into headstrong heroines. However, second wave princess's development did halt when it came to them meeting a love interest.

Dreams lost in their 'happily ever after'

There have been some significant changes found within the images of the second wave princesses in comparison with the first. First wave princesses were domesticated, passive victims who were desirous of a romantic relationship. Second wave princesses were assertive, rebellious, and brave. Although second wave princesses, by this comparison, had progressed from the docile

and passive images of femininity produced by the first, I argue second wave princesses were denied further progression due to each princess's narrative changing. Each princess desired adventure and was curious and eager to learn new things (Mollet 2020: 69). For Ariel, it was the human world (Whelan 2012: 26), for Belle, it was 'adventure in the great wide somewhere' (although she was not specific about what that was) (Sumera 2008: 44), for Jasmine, it was to escape palace life and live freely according to her own rules (Whelan 2012: 26). These desires clearly set them apart from first wave princesses. However, second wave princesses seemed to do very little to achieve those desires, and once they met their love interest, their desire for adventure was lost in their 'happily ever after' (Colombo and Muir 2020: 3; Garlen and Sandlin 2017: 963; Globan and Vuković 2022: 74; Heatwole 2016: 5; Lacroix 2004: 224; Sumera 2008: 42; Whelan 2012: 34). In this section, I discuss how each princess's desires and motivations change when they meet a love interest.

The first time we saw Ariel was when she was exploring a shipwreck looking for human treasure, rather than in a 'home' setting such as the first wave princesses (Davis 2006: 178). She collected everything she could find from forks to smoking pipes and took them to the surface of the ocean to consult Scuttle the seagull on what they were (England et al 2011: 564). She was desperate to explore the human world and experience all the things she saw in the treasures she found (Davis 2006: 178; Mollet 2020: 57, 58; Sells 1995: 179; Stover 2013: 4):

Ariel: Betcha on land, they understand.
 Bet they don't, reprimand their daughters.
 Bright young women, sick of swimmin', ready to stand.
 And ready to know what the people know, ask 'em my
 questions and get some answers.
 What's a fire? And why does it, what's the word? Burn?
 When's it my turn?
 Wouldn't I love, love to explore that shore up above?
 Out of the sea, wish I could be, part of that world.

However, Ariel never pursued her desire of exploring the human world, perhaps because she didn't believe it was possible. But, when she saw Prince Eric and rescued him, it made her determined to be part of 'his' world:

Ariel: What would I give to live where you are?
 What would I pay to stay here beside you?
 What would I do to see you, smiling at me?
 Where would we walk, where would we run?
 If we could stay all day in the sun?
 Just you and me, and I could be, part of your world.

Ariel's narrative (and her decisions thereafter) were now being fuelled by a desire for a romantic relationship (Clapp-Itnyre 2010: 11; Sells 1995: 180; Whelan 2012: 26, 28; 2014: 177). When her father found out that she had fallen in love with a human and destroyed her cavern of human treasures, Ariel was found by Ursula's eels, Flotsam and Jetsam, who explained they could help Ariel become human, and used Eric as the final persuasion for her to do it. When Ariel met Ursula and found she could be given a spell to become human and win the love of Eric, she was intrigued. However, Ursula demanded Ariel's voice as payment for legs and access to the human world (Sells 1995: 179). It was clear that throughout Ursula's rendition of 'Poor Unfortunate Souls' Ariel was torn between becoming a human forever and her life as a mermaid, she realized, "If I become human, I'll never be with my father or sisters again". Ursula then used Ariel's desire for a romantic relationship to persuade her further: "But, you'll have your man! Life's full of tough choices innit?". It was clear Ursula believed Ariel's desire for a romantic relationship was stronger than her desire to access the human world to explore it, and this was emphasized throughout 'Poor Unfortunate Souls', when Ursula centred the entire song around Eric, and what men liked and disliked. Ursula performed images of femininity reminiscent of the first wave princesses:

Ursula: All I want from you, is your voice.
Ariel: My voice? But without my voice how can I –
Ursula: You'll have your looks! Your pretty face!
And don't underestimate the importance of body language – ha!
The men up there don't like a lot of blabber
They think a girl who gossips is a bore.
Yet on land it's much preferred for ladies not to say a word
and after all dear what is idle prattle for?
Come on, they're not all that impressed with conversation!
True gentlemen avoid it when they can.
But they dote and swoon and fawn on a lady who's withdrawn
It's she who holds her tongue who gets a man.

Ursula was portraying the image of femininity as passive and subservient and was demonstrating to Ariel that performing womanhood in this way would help her attract Eric, even if she had no voice at all (Mollet 2020: 60; Sells 1995: 182–3). This was problematic, as it suggested that a woman's sole purpose was to attract men and encouraged women to give up their voice to do so (Maity 2014: 30). In reality, women and girls cannot 'give up' their physical voice in the way that Ariel did. However, women and girls can give up their voice in other ways such as not standing up for themselves or others or not contributing in school or workplace settings. When audiences saw

Ursula teaching Ariel how women should conduct themselves, they were seeing women lose their voice in the public sphere. Ultimately, Ariel chose to give up her voice to become human to meet Prince Eric, and for the rest of the film she was unable to communicate her identity to him, she was unable to ask any of the questions she wanted answering about the human world, and she was unable to stop him from marrying Vanessa (Ursula in disguise) instead of her. In fact, Eric could not even recognize Ariel as the woman who saved him until her voice returned (Davis 2006: 179; Mollet 2020: 60). Essentially, by giving up her voice, Ariel gave up access to the human world that she desired so much.

Belle dreamt of adventure beyond simple village life. An avid reader, she was portrayed as different from the rest of the villagers due to her love of books.⁵ Belle rejected romantic advances made towards her and explained that she wanted more than the provincial life she lived. She wanted adventure and someone to understand her – although she did not specify whether she desired a romantic relationship:

Belle: I want adventure in the great wide somewhere,
I want it more than I can tell.
And for once it might be grand,
to have someone understand.
I want so much more than they've got planned.

It was here Belle may have been referring to the villagers, who believed she was 'odd' for reading books and rejecting Gaston. Alternatively, she could have been referring to her previous altercation with Gaston. A hunter in the village, Gaston declared Belle "the most beautiful girl in town", claiming "that makes her the best, and don't I deserve the best?". Gaston went to great lengths to court Belle, who rejected every advance he made. He even planned and arranged their wedding outside of her house *before* proposing marriage to her:

Gaston: This is the day your dreams come true.
Belle: What do you know about my dreams, Gaston?
Gaston: Plenty! Here. Picture this. [*Puts his muddy shoes on the book Belle was reading*] A rustic hunting lodge, my latest kill roasting on the fire and my little wife massaging my feet while the little ones play on the floor with the dogs. We'll have six or seven.
Belle: Dogs?
Gaston: No, Belle! Strapping boys like me.

Belle rejected Gaston again – this time completely humiliating him. But once again we could see on face value, they were simply incompatible

(Mollet 2020: 64). He was a hunter who believed women shouldn’t read – which he clearly indicated by putting up his muddy boots onto her book – and she was an avid reader, eager to learn about the world. It was also clear that Gaston made no effort to understand Belle or what she wanted from life, this was made particularly clear when Belle questioned what Gaston knew of her dreams, and he described her being a housewife.

Belle’s dreams of adventure were interrupted for a real one when her horse, Phillippe, returned without her father and she realized he could be in danger. Going to search for her father brought her to the Beast’s castle, where she discovered her father had been taken prisoner for trespassing. She bravely decided to exchange her freedom for her father’s so he could return home, and she was trapped in the Beast’s castle. This was one of the two pivotal narrative changes within Belle’s story line. Firstly, Belle was relinquishing her freedom, and any chance of having the adventures she had wished for. This was out of filial duty and care for her father (Cummins 1995: 25). The second pivotal narrative change to Belle’s story line was when she made the decision to leave the Beast’s castle after he verbally abused her in the West Wing. Belle galloped off on Phillippe into the forest but was cornered by wolves. She tried to defend herself but there were many of them and only one of her, with Philippe’s rein trapped on a tree branch. The wolves closed in, but at the very last moment the Beast appeared and defended Belle against the wolves. Belle could only ‘helplessly stand aside’ (Sumera 2008: 42). When the Beast severely injured himself in the process of rescuing Belle, she still had a chance to escape. It was at this point that Belle, seeing the Beast fall to the ground, went to get back on her horse to go home. But she paused and looked back at the now injured and helpless Beast. Belle then made the decision to return the injured Beast to the castle and care for him, ‘her attempt to break free from her imprisonment is suddenly forgotten’ (Sumera 2008: 42). Her empowering moment of standing up to abuse and mistreatment also forgotten. It was here that Belle truly gave up her freedom, when she returned the individual who said she could starve, and verbally abused her, to his home and continued to care for his injuries.

For the rest of the film, Belle and the Beast began to form a friendship, with the Beast suddenly being framed as misunderstood rather than abusive, partly thanks to Belle’s positive influence (Jeffords 1995: 170; Mollet 2020: 66). Unlike Gaston, the Beast learnt about Belle’s passions and gave her a library – but still kept her prisoner. It was not until Belle saw that her father was sick that the Beast told her to go home, where she would simply go from caring for one man to another. Belle did receive her ‘happy ending’, she was reunited with the Beast, she broke the Beast’s curse by falling in love with him, transforming him back into a human. Belle received a happily ever after in the form of a relationship with the

Beast, but her desire for adventure seemed to be lost (Cummins 1995: 25, 27; Hains 2015: 212).

Jasmine rejected her life as a princess, feeling trapped because she had to marry before her next birthday. She longed for a life of her own choosing outside the palace walls. As discussed previously, she was the only princess that actively did something to remedy her situation. She left the palace in the dark and entered the market of Agrabah, exploring life outside the palace. However, after she met Aladdin and he was arrested by the palace guards she was forced to reveal her identity to save him, as she realized the guards would not listen to her in her disguise as a peasant girl. Jasmine then returned to the palace, to her life as a princess.

Still being forced to marry, Jasmine met Aladdin who was disguised as Prince Ali, but rejected his arrogant nature. It wasn't until she realized he was the boy from the marketplace that Jasmine decided to get to know him more. Aladdin – disguised as Prince Ali – took Jasmine out on a magic carpet, explaining that he could 'show her the world'. This was Jasmine's second time out of the palace, and she was clearly excited to be seeing so many new places. However, Jasmine was steered back to the desire of a romantic relationship: the evening ended in a kiss between Jasmine and Aladdin, who had convinced her that he disguised himself as Aladdin in the marketplace and was a true prince. Even at the end of the film, after Jafar had been defeated, the focus remained on Jasmine's marriage. The Sultan decided that he would change the law:

Sultan: Well am I sultan or am I Sultan? From this day forth, the princess shall marry whoever she deems worthy.

Jasmine: Him. I choose ... I choose you, Aladdin.

Christiane Staninger (2003) explains that 'Jasmine's strong will and determination convinces her dad to change century-old laws' (67), suggesting that Jasmine's assertive nature contributed to changing her life. However, rather than changing the law to remove the forced marriage, the Sultan simply said that a princess could choose her own husband. Jasmine chose Aladdin, and her dreams of adventure were lost within her 'happy ending'. Although Jasmine was initially upset about the thought of her forced marriage (as she wanted to marry for love), the only persuasion she needed was to simply find the right Prince (Mitchell-Smith 2012: 220). And although Jasmine loved Aladdin, I question *how* after knowing him for such a short period, and for him lying to her for most of it. The storyline suggested that as soon as the 'right man' came along, everything would fall into place for the film's heroine, and her dreams of adventure outside the palace walls were lost.

First wave princesses were rewarded for their passive and docile behaviour with a romantic relationship, having desired one for much of their storyline. As discussed in the first wave chapter, this was problematic for two reasons. Firstly, desiring a romantic relationship was the main focal point of first wave princesses, leaving little room for more complex character development. Secondly, first wave princesses are what I have called 'passive dreamers': they know their desires, but they made no attempt to achieve it. Those dreams were reduced to desiring a romantic relationship, suggesting that was their final life goal. First wave princesses were rewarded for their passivity with a romantic relationship in the film, with their prince literally coming to them, and often rescuing them in the process.

The second wave princesses however began their storyline as desiring more from life than those in the first wave, having dreams and aspirations that did not involve a romantic relationship, let alone men (Mollet 2020: 69). However, as I have demonstrated, there was always a change in the plot which caused the princess to change their desires. Cassandra Stover (2013) comments on the post-feminist narrative transition specifically within the context of Ariel. She explained:

While the princess's desires and ambitions are largely unprecedented within the Disney canon, the film reorders her goals much in the way post-feminism reordered the American woman's goals. The film initially posits Ariel's fascination with land as cause for leaving the ocean, but in the style of backlash politics, it eventually channels her struggle for independence and autonomy into the more traditional, narrow goal of choosing a husband. (Stover 2013: 4–5)

Not only is this analysis relevant to Ariel, but the rest of the second wave princesses. Ariel desired to explore the human world but didn't even think to try and access it herself until she saw and fell in love with Prince Eric. When she did, it was solely to win his heart.⁶ Belle desired adventure but traded her freedom for that of her father's out of filial duty, and when she did have a chance to escape, she chose to return to the castle where she was imprisoned, and care for the person who had imprisoned her. By the end of *Beauty and the Beast*, Belle and the newly humanized Beast were in a relationship and there was no mention or suggestion of her desire for adventure. Finally, Jasmine longed for her freedom from a forced marriage outside the palace walls, however once she met the 'right' prince, she happily agreed to marry. Again, like Belle, Jasmine's wish for adventure was lost in her happy ending. As Mollet (2020) argues: 'While these heroines are progressive in their *outlook*, the conclusions to their narratives still conform to those of their classical era

predecessors. Marriage to respectable men of royal heritage is the closing point to each of these stories' (70).

Although Mollet's analysis did not extend to Jasmine, it can be argued that while Aladdin was not of royal heritage, the Sultan clearly approved and deemed Aladdin as a respectable suitor. The ending of these princess stories focused on their relationships, rather than their original dreams. Therefore, second wave princesses were what I call 'lost dreamers', as although Ariel, Belle, and Jasmine (and the anomaly, Eilonwy) knew what they wanted – which allowed for further complex character development through images of rebelliousness, assertiveness and bravery – their initial desires and dreams are lost in their 'happy ending'.

Conclusion

The second wave are 'lost dreamers'. These heroines had specific dreams and aspirations that did not involve romance or men. They wanted to escape entrapment (Eilonwy), explore human worlds (Ariel), have an adventure outside provincial life (Belle), and explore life beyond restrictive palace walls (Jasmine). Each desire was different from the next, with each woman wanting to explore something new and different. However, their aspirations were cast to one side when they met a love interest. Eilonwy managed to escape with Taran, and the end of the film implied the beginning of their romantic relationship. Ariel did not even think to try and become a human until she was motivated by her desire for Prince Eric. Belle gave up any chance of adventure when she took her father's place as prisoner in the Beast's castle. When she did have an opportunity to escape, she returned to care for the Beast, and only left to care for her sick father. Jasmine escaped the palace walls but was forced to reveal her identity to protect her love interest Aladdin, and then happily agreed to marry him at the end of the film. Their stories ended at the beginning of their marriage (Ariel and Jasmine) or relationship (Eilonwy and Belle), so the audience never saw if they were able to achieve their dreams they had at the beginning of the story, their initial desires lost in their 'happy ending'. 'Lost dreamers' acknowledges that the princesses had dreams that didn't involve romance at the beginning of their stories, which allowed them to develop assertive, rebellious, and brave characteristics. However, their dreams became lost when they found their love interest, the princesses assertive, rebellious, and brave behaviour policed through romantic relationships.

Second wave characteristics built on that of their predecessors. First wave passivity was replaced with assertiveness. The princesses no longer accepted injustice, they actively tried to dismantle it in some cases. First wave victimhood was replaced with rebelliousness and bravery. Ariel, Belle, and Jasmine were unhappy with elements in their life and were often seen

rebellious against men who were trying to control them in some way. There was a limit to the rebelliousness and assertiveness they demonstrated, as Belle and Jasmine were never seen committing the violent acts needed to rescue themselves. These were committed by men, often on their behalf. Ariel did commit an act of violence to save Prince Eric, but it was pure coincidence rather than planned, and Ariel, Belle, and Jasmine were rescued by their princes. Their bravery however seemed to know little bounds and each princess rescued or assisted their prince in some way within their films (with Eilonwy often having to give Taran instructions on what to do, but not actually doing it herself), something first wave princesses could not even do for themselves.

However, each princess' intentions to follow their dreams changed once a love interest was introduced into the storyline. Although the princesses demonstrated traits of assertiveness, rebellion, and bravery throughout the film, their story ended with the beginning of a romantic relationship. Their initial traits were no longer seen as they were whisked off into the sunset: Eilonwy started a new life with Taran; Ariel married Eric; Belle danced with the newly human Beast; and Jasmine married Aladdin. I argue the introduction of a love interest policed the princess' transgressions. Romantic relationships quashed and suppressed the princess' assertiveness, rebelliousness, and bravery, perhaps reminding them of how they *should* behave in a patriarchal society. This was clearer when the story ended, and the viewers had no idea whether Eilonwy truly got her freedom; or whether Ariel learnt about the human world; if Belle truly got an adventure; or Jasmine was able to explore the world outside of palace walls. Their stories end with the beginning of a relationship, a reminder of their feminine expectations.

In addition, the second wave of princesses were still centring whiteness. Although Jasmine had been introduced to the Disney Princess Phenomenon as the first princess of colour, 'she retains many White features' (Lacroix 2004: 220) and was 'strongly Americanized' (Benhamou 2014b: 155). Disney still had a long way to go for the representation of princesses of colour.

It also suggested that despite the changes to women's rights and roles within American society, women were still not 'quite there' in terms of equality. The progression that women's rights had made in the 1980s and 1990s, such as more legislation being passed that protected women from sexual harassment and discrimination in the workplace; their right to an abortion and their increased presence in wider workplaces was perhaps reflected through the assertive, rebellious, and brave natures of the second wave princesses. Although Eilonwy, Ariel, Belle, and Jasmine's desires for more from life were lost within the romantic 'happy ending' of their film, the 1980s and 1990s American woman was also experiencing setbacks through states controlling public funding for abortions; which hospitals were able

to perform them; and whether consent was required from a third party in the case of minors. Although these situations differed, the princesses were almost reflecting the curtailing of women's rights and journey to equality through their 'lost dreams'. The princess films seemed to be reminding the postfeminist audience that while it was 'fine' to be assertive, rebellious, and brave, as well as desire more from life, the end goal was still a romantic relationship.

‘Active Leaders’: Transgressive Princesses

Third wave films were released in close succession to the second, with *Pocahontas* in 1995, *Mulan* in 1998 and *Atlantis: The Lost Empire* in 2001. More changes were occurring. The most notable was women’s representation within the public sphere, and further legislation enabling women’s rights. In 1993, Janet Reno became the first female attorney general of the United States (Mollet 2020: 48–9), and in 1997, Madeleine Albright became the first female Secretary of State. In terms of legislation, the Violence Against Women Act (1994) was signed by President Bill Clinton. The act funded services and civil rights assistance for victims of rape and domestic violence (Clinton White House n.d.). However, ‘Clinton notably remained very quiet on issues of race, abortion and class’ (Mollet 2020: 49), indicating not all people were being supported at this time. Years later, the Supreme Court denied victims of rape and domestic violence to sue their perpetrators in federal court (*United States v Morrison* 2000). In 1996, Fauziya Kassindja sought asylum in the US to escape from her home country’s practice of female genital mutilation (FGM), it was accepted, and immigration law reflected a wider change for supporting FGM victims (*Matter of Kasinga* 1996).

Despite Disney’s success in the early 1990s, there were a few issues arising around the time of *Pocahontas*’ release. In 1994, the President of Disney, Frank Wells, was killed in a helicopter crash (Associated Press 1994). Chief executive officer (CEO) Michael Eisner appointed Michael Ovitz (reportedly a friend of Eisner’s) as his replacement (Mills 1995). Nevertheless, *Pocahontas* continued the success of previous princess films, despite the issues within the studio. The film had a gross of \$346,079,773 and was ranked fourth in the worldwide gross ratings (Box Office Mojo n.d.h). *Mulan* – based on *The Ballad of Mulan* – amassed \$304,320,254 worldwide (Box Office Mojo n.d.i). *Atlantis: The Lost Empire* did not continue the success, generating \$186,053,725 (Box Office Mojo n.d.j). This was perhaps why Kida was not

included in the Disney Princess Franchise, as in comparison with the other recent princess films, it was not a success.

Pocahontas, Mulan, and Kida were created soon after their second wave counterparts and [Stover \(2013\)](#) described Pocahontas and Mulan along with Ariel, Belle, Jasmine, and Tiana as ‘proactive heroines’ that reflected changing gender roles of American society at this time (3). Up until Jasmine in the second wave, the princess phenomenon had featured only white women. With the introduction of the third wave princesses, Disney introduced three princesses of colour to the phenomenon. Although Jasmine from the second wave, and Pocahontas, Mulan, and Kida from the third demonstrate Disney’s attempts to diversify the princesses ([Mollet 2020:68](#)), this book will also be examining how this diversification works in other facets of the phenomenon such as merchandising and consumer experiences. This is where audiences and consumers will be able to associate with and be further exposed to particular princesses over others. This more diverse representation has an impact for audiences and wider society, as Jennifer Kokai and Tom Robson ([2019](#)) argue: ‘The introduction of Disney Princesses of color provided non-white young girls a character to identify with and encouraged society to expand their expectations of what a princess looks like’ (9). However, the diversification of the princess phenomenon is important to consider, especially when the creators of these films (Disney) are a Western company, with scholars such as [Anjirbag \(2018\)](#) arguing ‘it remains important to talk about the power dynamics involved when a company such as Disney decides to tell stories from outside its own sphere, rooted in Western, Anglo-American, conservative-leaning hegemonic culture’ (3). Anjirbag considers bell hooks’ argument that ‘the commodification of Otherness has been so successful because it is offered as a new delight, more intense, more satisfying than normal ways of doing and feeling ... ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is main stream white culture’ (hooks 1992: 21 cited in [Anjirbag 2018:3](#)). For example, the depictions of Chinese culture in *Mulan* are provided with no context and are not historically accurate: ‘the episode with the matchmaker, the presence of the Huns, the presence of the shrine to the ancestors, the clothing, and presenting villains as darker-skinned’ ([Anjirbag 2018: 5](#)). Considering this, [Anjirbag \(2018\)](#) argues *Mulan* is ‘part of that “seasoning” on the hegemonic status quo’ (3). Although Anjirbag deliberately excludes *Pocahontas* from their analysis, as *Mulan* is based on Chinese legend, and Pocahontas is a historical figure whose story has been romanticized and appropriated ([Anjirbag 2018: 2](#)), I would argue Disney’s choice to represent more diverse princesses beyond Anjirbag’s analysis of *Mulan* (and *Moana* – which I will discuss later) can still be applied to other third wave princesses. It can be no surprise that Disney elected to continue to diversify their princess line but did not do so respectfully or appropriately.

For example, as I will discuss in this chapter, Pocahontas’ story is full of historical inaccuracies (Lee-Oliver 2020).¹

As Kida, like Eilonwy, is not in the official Disney Princess Franchise, Stover excludes her from analysis. I include her within my analysis of the princess phenomenon due to her royal status as a princess. I argue third wave princesses receive further narrative and plot development outside of romantic relationships, so I consider them as a separate wave due to their leadership, communication, and negotiation skills, despite the fact they were made in a similar period to the second wave.

Third wave characteristics

As outlined in the first and second wave chapters, I identified several characteristics in the third wave films. I recorded each princesses’ speech, movement, narrative, and plot lines. Pocahontas was depicted as connected to nature, athletic, assertive, communicator, rebellious, curious, eager to learn, independent, desiring a romantic relationship, negotiator, brave, courageous, and a leader. Other characters also recognized her as connected to nature, rebellious, and as a negotiator and leader. She was also viewed as courageous and free-spirited, but also someone in need of protection, someone to marry, and someone to other. Mulan was depicted as scatter-brained, resourceful, intelligent, assertive, bringing honour, having filial duty, rebellious, brave (when she is herself as a woman), determined, athletic, communicator, a warrior, astute, courageous, a leader (when she is dressed as Ping and when she is herself) and hints of a romantic relationship at the end of the film. Other characters viewed Mulan as scatter-brained, a means of upholding honour, a means of bringing honour, someone to marry, someone to bear children, dishonouring the family, othered (when she is herself as a woman), brave (when she is dressed as Ping), othered (when she is discovered as a woman), and she is honoured as a woman when she saves China. Kida was also depicted as curious, a communicator, assertive, a leader, blunt, athletic, protector of Atlantis and like Mulan, a romantic relationship is implied at the end of the film. Other characters viewed Kida as a leader, beautiful, and protector of Atlantis.

I identified 44 characteristics across the three films. The third wave developed the second wave’s assertive nature, producing signs of leadership, communication, and negotiation. Romantic relationships were also not the only (and in some cases barely at all) focal point of the story, which is why Pocahontas, Mulan, and Kida formed the third wave as a progression of the second. Pocahontas, Mulan, and Kida shared five characteristics: assertiveness, leadership, communication, negotiation, and a lack (with the exception – to an extent – of Pocahontas) of romantic relationships driving the plot. The third wave began to transgress from their predecessors entirely and

produced plotlines that focused on conflict and the princesses' aims and success in resolving it.

Assertive

Like the second wave, Pocahontas, Mulan, and Kida each demonstrated assertiveness. I am using the same definition of assertiveness as before: a confident individual who can clearly and effectively stand up for themselves and others.

Pocahontas demonstrated her assertive nature early in the film, when she was informed by her father, Powhatan, that a warrior called Kocoum had asked for her hand in marriage. This was something first and second wave princesses had to deal with in their narratives. Both Aurora and Jasmine were informed they were to marry, with Aurora passively accepting her fate and Jasmine rejecting all her suitors until the 'right man' came along. Pocahontas, on the other hand, assertively communicated her disagreement:

Pocahontas: Father, I think my dream is pointing me down a
 different path.
Powhatan: This is the right path for you.
Pocahontas: Why can't I choose?

Rather than simply accepting the decision Powhatan had made for her (like Aurora) or rejecting it until the right man came along (like Jasmine), Pocahontas calmly disagreed and assertively said she did not want to do what he was asking (Towbin et al 2004: 38). Her father told her that she must take her place among her people as the daughter of the chief, comparing Pocahontas to the wild stream that must join the big river. It was difficult to tell whether Powhatan was suggesting that Pocahontas needed to take her place as a leader, or as a wife. Based on his interactions with her throughout the film it was clear that Powhatan respected his daughter, especially at the end (which I discuss later). He was perhaps pushing the idea of marriage to secure the family lineage. But Pocahontas did not see it the same way. When she went canoeing after their conversation, she commented, "He wants me to be steady. Like the river. [*Two otters jump from the water.*] But it's not steady at all!". For the rest of the film, Pocahontas showed no interest in Kocoum, and instead developed a relationship with John Smith, an English colonizer. An imperialist, John told Pocahontas about his life in England, and how the English would bring their way of life to the people of Virginia, whether they liked it or not:

John Smith: Wait a minute. Don't take it like that – [*Flit attacks him*]
 He – hey! Wait! Wait! There's so much we can teach

you. [*He stops the boat that Pocahontas has begun paddling*]
 We've improved the lives of savages all over the world.

Pocahontas: [*Enraged*] Savages?

John Smith: Not that you're a savage.

Pocahontas: Just my people.

John Smith: No. Listen, that's not what I meant. Let me explain.

Pocahontas: [*Splashes him with her oar*] Let go!

John Smith: [*Grabs the boat and encroaches her space*] No. I'm not letting you leave.

This scene demonstrated Pocahontas using her assertiveness to hold John Smith accountable for his words. When she first met John Smith, she was curious about him, where he came from, and his way of life. However, when he made racist and culturally imperialist remarks about her people, she refused to tolerate him. Pocahontas defended her own people's method for building accommodation when John Smith suggested that the English would be able to teach them to 'build better houses', she immediately retorted that their houses were fine the way they were. John then implied she and her people didn't know any better, demonstrating his imperialism. By suggesting her 'ignorance' he implied firstly, she and her people were uncivilized and would therefore not understand the benefit of or need for English housing, and secondly, that as a woman she would not understand this because she was confined to the private sphere. When Pocahontas decided to remove herself from the situation, John patronized her, claiming there was so much the English could teach her people. Pocahontas immediately reprimanded John for suggesting that she and her people were savages because they did things differently (Parekh 2003: 168). When John Smith tried to backtrack the conversation, saying he wasn't referring specifically to her and physically grabbing her canoe so she couldn't leave, Pocahontas commanded him to let go of her canoe. When he tried to intimidate her by encroaching on her space and telling her that he wouldn't let her leave, she removed herself from the situation. Unlike the first wave, she refused to be dominated by Smith, and assertively confronted him for his poor behaviour. Unlike second wave princesses, Pocahontas was not easily persuaded by one simple apology for poor behaviour. Not only did she stand up for herself, but also for her people (Dundes 2001: 353).

However, it is important to note the wider inaccuracies and structures at play here. This scene, and the song 'Colours of the Wind' that proceeds it, represents Pocahontas as 'the noble savage' 'in harmony with nature and victimised' (Benhamou 2014b: 157). It has been widely commented that Disney's 'retelling' of Pocahontas ignores and romanticizes the horrors of colonialism (Anjirbag 2018: 2; Benhamou 2014b; Buescher and Ono 1996; Dundes 2001: 354; Edwards 1999: 148, 161; Henke 2008: 126;

Mitchell-Smith 2012: 213; Parekh 2003: 170, 172). It is highly unlikely this conversation occurred, nor would it have involved Pocahontas asserting herself and John Smith engaging with her views. Therefore, Pocahontas as a Disney Princess presents a complexity within the phenomenon. On the one hand, she is an empowered princess, but on the other her film and narrative is based on the romanticization of colonialism and the appropriation of her culture. Although this book is focusing on the representation of femininity within the Disney Princess Phenomenon, it is imperative to acknowledge the appropriation Disney engaged with when retelling this story and what that means for the representation of Native American women. Although the second wave demonstrated an assertive nature by standing up for themselves when they were being mistreated by men, Pocahontas combined her assertive nature with communication to teach John Smith why he was in the wrong. Like Pocahontas and the second wave princesses, Mulan also demonstrated her assertiveness through her conversations with other men.

Another woman who was expected to bring honour to her family by marrying well, Mulan was portrayed as the opposite to her society's 'ideal woman'. She often demonstrated this through her assertive behaviour. Imposed images of femininity within *Mulan* (Limbach 2013: 117) were like that of the first wave:²

Women: Men want girls with good taste.
 Calm, obedient, who work fast paced.
 With good breeding and a tiny waist.

The song, 'Honour to Us All' implies 'a woman's worth is dependent on her ability to win a husband vis-à-vis her physical appearance and knowing her duties and keeping to her place in society. This message is one that is meant to jar with expectations of a Western, feminist audience' (Anjirbag 2018: 11). Mulan, however, was the opposite of this. Despite the fact that her society asked her to be demure and obedient, Mulan spoke and acted when she was not supposed to. This is particularly interesting when scholars have pointed out cultural and historical inaccuracies in this depiction, designed to pit the individual 'modern' Mulan up against the patriarchal and sexist depiction of Chinese society (Djao 2002; Hains 2014: 12, 2015: 212; Ng 2004; Sun 2003; Yin 2011).³ Therefore, Mulan's assertiveness is being highlighted further through Disney's retelling of Chinese culture within a Western framework. This was more prevalent when it was announced that the Huns had invaded China, and one man from every family must join the army to protect their country. Mulan was an only child, so her father Fa Zhou had to enrol, however despite being a great warrior he was ill. Mulan wanted to protect her father's life and tried to intervene:

Mulan: Father, you can't go.
Fa Zhou: Mulan!
Mulan: Please, sir, my father has already fought bravely.
Chi-Fu: Silence! You would do well to teach your daughter to hold her tongue in a man's presence.
Fa Zhou: Mulan, you dishonour me.

A proud man refusing to dishonour his family, Fa Zhou accepted the conscription note, however Mulan stood up for her father when he would not do it for himself. Mulan and her family were shamed for her assertive behaviour, reinforcing the idea that Mulan did not fit the ideal of Chinese femininity within the film. But it is this kind of behaviour that demonstrates how much the princess phenomenon has changed. It was likely that Mulan knew speaking 'out of turn' to a man in a public place was not accepted in her society, but she did it anyway to stand up for her father. As we saw in the first wave chapter, although first wave princesses such as Snow White and Cinderella recognized they were being exploited, they did not have the capacity to do anything about it. Although it could be argued that this may be due to the period their stories were set, Mulan still rebelled against the mistreatment of others and prescribed gender roles within the narrative of Ancient China Disney created. This seems to make the 'time period' as a reason for passivity redundant.

This image continued later when Mulan expressed her disagreement with her father's decision:

Mulan: You shouldn't have to go!
Fa Li: Mulan!
Mulan: There are plenty of young men to fight for China.
Fa Zhou: It is an honour to protect my country and my family.
Mulan: So, you'll die for honour?
Fa Zhou: I will die doing what's right.
Mulan: But if you –
Fa Zhou: [*Shouting*] I know my place! It is time you learned yours.

This time, Mulan challenged her father about his own decision making. As demonstrated in the previous scene, Fa Zhou was a proud man who would rather go to war knowing he was ill and die with honour than stay at home and recover with his family. Although his wife, Fa Li, and Grandmother Fa were both upset about his decision they did not question it. However, Mulan disagreed and was not afraid to speak her mind, despite her ignoring tradition and honour to do so. This emphasized Mulan's assertive nature further, as in this case she was now holding her own father accountable to his actions, rather than just passively accepting his decision as the head of the family.

When she realized her father would not listen, Mulan took his choice away from him (Do Rozario 2004: 52; Davis 2006: 197; Davis 2014: 50). After seeing how her father's decision was impacting both her parents, she acted. Mulan prayed to her ancestors, took her father's conscription note and left her flower clip in its place. She cut her hair with her father's sword, took his armour, and rode off into the night to take his place in the army. Although many have argued this was an act of filial duty (Dong 2010: 164; Ma 2003: 153; Maity 2014: 30; Youngs 1999: 312), Mulan protected her father by removing him from the situation altogether. Henke goes further with this, highlighting the work of Weimin Mo and Wenju Shen (2000) who 'pointed out that Confucian teachings allow children to replace their parents, and that Mulan is acting out of traditional Chinese values in joining the military in her father's stead' (Henke 2008: 130), which is also the original interpretation of the *Ballad of Mulan* through the understanding of filial piety and loyalty (Yin 2011: 66). Not only did this demonstrate her assertive nature, but it also highlighted her bravery for deciding to replace her father despite having no military or combat training. Yin (2011) has also argued that rather than filial duty, the underlying reason for Mulan's choice to replace her father was for her own self-esteem (59). For the remainder of the film, other than at the very end, Mulan disguised herself as Ping. It was through Ping that Mulan was able to continue acting assertively (for example, when she led an attack on the Hun by causing an avalanche, saved Li Shang, even though she was breaking orders) and not be questioned, which demonstrated the gendered roles within her narrative (Dundes and Streiff 2016: 1).

Kida, the princess of the lost city of Atlantis progressed the image of assertiveness within the third wave even further. Kida decided to welcome Milo Thatch and his group of explorers led by Captain Rourke in the hopes they would be able to help her save Atlantis from dying out. She displayed her assertive nature from her introduction. Upon their first meeting, one of the explorers seemingly whispered something uninvited, unwanted, and inappropriate in her ear, so she punched him. Other than Mulan acting as a warrior in the Chinese army, this was the first time a Disney audience saw a princess committing an act of violence. Although we did not hear what was said, Kida deemed it as disrespectful and unwanted enough to punch a man she had just met, a stark contrast to the princesses who came before her. Kida stood up for herself and made it clear that his words were unacceptable in Atlantis. This was a far cry from the way first and second wave princesses reacted to their encounters with men. Snow White and Aurora seemed to forget that the 'true loves kiss' that saved them was non-consensual. Belle and Jasmine were often dealing with men who made uninvited comments. For Belle, Gaston, and when she first met him, the Beast; and for Jasmine, most of the princes who came to court her, and

at the beginning of his disguise, Aladdin. Neither of them reacted in this way. Perhaps what Kida heard was worse, we will never know. However, it never happened again for the rest of the film.

Kida’s assertive nature was often contrasted with Milo Thatch’s nervous one:

[*Milo is waiting for Kida.*]

Milo: [Talking to himself] Okay Milo, don’t take no for an answer. Look, I have some questions for you, and I’m not leaving this city until they’re answered. Yeah. Th-that’s it. That’s good, that’s good.

[*Milo goes to look for Kida, but she has gone. She suddenly appears from nowhere and grabs Milo.*]

Kida: I have some questions for you, and you are not leaving this city until they are answered.

Milo: Yeah, well I – okay.

Even though Milo was the one who wanted to initiate a conversation and get answers about Atlantis, it was Kida who drove the discussion. Milo spent some time giving himself a pep talk to speak to Kida, which could suggest that she made him nervous. His nervousness did not seem to be born from physical attraction to her, rather he saw her as an assertive woman and believed he needed to be equally assertive to get the answers he wanted. And even when Milo did seem to have the upper hand in a conversation, Kida would not allow him to patronize her:

[*Kida shows Milo an Atlantean hovercraft.*]

Kida: Yes, but no matter what I try, it will not respond. Perhaps if –

Milo: [Getting cocky] Way ahead of you. Okay let’s see what we got here. [*He looks at the instructions*] Okay. ‘Place crystal into slot’.

Kida: Yes, yes, I have done that.

Milo: ‘Gently place your hand on the inscription pad’.

Kida: Yes.

Milo: Okay, did you turn the crystal one quarter-turn back?

Kida: Yes, yes.

Milo: Whilst your hand was on the inscription pad?

Kida: Ye – no.

Milo: [*Cocky again*] Ah, well, see, that’s your problem right there. That’s an easy thing to miss, you know. You deserve credit for even – [*Kida crosses her arms and looks unimpressed*] even gettin’ this far. [*She is still unimpressed*]

Kida only used her facial expressions and body language to indicate she did not appreciate the way Milo was talking to her. And it was her facial

expressions and body language alone that could prompt Milo to adjust his behaviour. This was a new character contrast within princess films, as the men that first and second wave princesses (and even Kida's fellow third wave princesses!) communicated with were incredibly confident. Although not playing a large role in the films, Prince Charming in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, Prince Charming in *Cinderella*, and Prince Phillip in *Sleeping Beauty* were portrayed as confident and charismatic. This image of masculinity was seen again within second wave films, Prince Eric, the Beast, and Aladdin were all incredibly confident men, which was especially seen in their interactions with women. Within *Beauty and the Beast*, Belle even had to contend with Gaston whose confidence blended to arrogance as the film went on. The fact that Kida's assertiveness made men nervous and perhaps intimidated by her demonstrated the progression of the third wave princesses, as well as a change in the way that men were being portrayed within Disney films.

Like the second wave, Pocahontas, Mulan, and Kida were assertive. They stood up for themselves and the people they cared for, held people accountable for their actions, and demanded respect from the people who surrounded them. They were even able to remain assertive, considering their stories take place in early time periods, rendering the passivity due to the period argument redundant. For Kida, her assertive nature contrasted with Milo's nervous one showed further progression for images of assertiveness within the third wave. However, this was just the first layer, as at this point, they shared an image of femininity with the second. What set third wave princesses apart from the second was their use of communication and negotiation.

Communicator and negotiator

The third wave princesses' ability to communicate and negotiate with others also built their leadership skills, which I discuss in the next section. I define communication as an individual's ability to clearly and confidently discuss issues affecting themselves and others around them. I interpret a negotiator to be an individual who can reach a mutually beneficial agreement between two parties, often through communication. Through communication and negotiation, third wave princesses were able to confidently display leadership and resolve issues presented to them.

A young Native American woman, Pocahontas was presented as being free spirited and connected to nature. She was often encouraged to listen to her heart by her confidant, Grandmother Willow. These characteristics contributed to Pocahontas being set apart from other characters in the film as a communicator and negotiator. Although the Powhatan's and the English were set on attacking each other to resolve their conflict,

Pocahontas constantly tried to use communication and negotiation within her diplomacy (Edwards 1999: 153, 154; Steinhoff 2017: 163). Pocahontas’ skills in communication and negotiation were clearly seen when she had discussions with John Smith:

- John Smith: Look, don’t do this. Savage is just a term for ... people who are uncivilized. *[John follows Pocahontas through the tree she is climbing to get away from him]*
- Pocahontas: Like me?
- John Smith: *[He is struggling to navigate through the tree, whereas for Pocahontas it is second nature]* When I say uncivilized, what I mean is ... is *[he grabs a weak branch and falls from the tree. Pocahontas lands gracefully]*
- Pocahontas: What you mean is ... not like you.
 You think I’m an ignorant savage,
 And you’ve been so many places,
 I guess it must be so,
 But still I cannot see,
 If the savage one is me,
 How can there be so much that you don’t know,
 You don’t know.

Pocahontas used the song ‘Colours of the Wind’ to highlight the wrongs of imperialism, colonialism, and racism and held John Smith accountable for his words and actions (Edwards 1999: 158–9). She educated John by taking him around her land and showed him the things that imperialism, colonialism, and racism were destroying (Towbin et al 2004: 30, 38). She questioned his imperialist worldview, telling him, “You think you own whatever land you land on, the Earth is just a dead thing you can claim”. She held him accountable for his racist and narrow-minded thinking, reminding him, “You think the only people who are people, are the people who look and think like you, but if you walk the footsteps of a stranger, you’ll learn things you never knew”. It was clear that after the song had ended, Smith had absorbed Pocahontas’ message (Dundes 2001: 356). Critics of the film have problematized *Pocahontas* regarding its romanticization of British imperialism and brushing over the horrors of colonial rule (Anjirbag 2018: 2; Benhamou 2014b; Buescher and Ono 1996; Dundes 2001: 354; Edwards 1999: 148, 161; Henke 2008: 126; Mitchell-Smith 2012: 213; Parekh 2003: 170, 172). Not only does this ‘other’ Pocahontas, it is also historically inaccurate. Roy Disney argued ‘Pocahontas is a story that appealed to us because it was basically a story about people getting along together, which is particularly applicable in the world today’ (*Pocahontas Press Kit* 1995: 33). However, it must be noted that Pocahontas’ historical past was *not* about

people getting along together at all, it was the English colonizing lands that did not belong to them. Edgerton and Jackson (1996) argued the Disney filmmakers ‘never really intended *Pocahontas* to be historically accurate, despite all the sentimental rhetoric’, going onto explain that ‘Native American advisors were hired to secure a more positive, even hagiographic, portrayal of Native American characters within an earnestly sympathetic narrative’ (93). While it is clear Pocahontas is critical of John Smith and his people, and her communication skills in this story led to change, this is not what happened in reality. That Smith has internalized Pocahontas’ message is (in reality) anachronistic.

However, my purpose here was to analyse the images of femininity created by Pocahontas. It became clear that Pocahontas’ message had become instilled in John when he returned to the English settlement and defended the Powhatan’s and their land:

John Smith: We don’t have to fight them.
 Thomas: What’s gotten into you?
 John Smith: I met one of them.
 Ben: You what?
 Thomas: A savage?
 John Smith: They’re not savages. They can help us. They know the land. They know how to navigate the rivers. [*Meeko produces some corn from John’s bag*] And look. It’s food.

The fact that John Smith corrected his fellow Englishmen that the Powhatan tribe were not savages indicated that Pocahontas communicated clearly. John Smith had transformed from a colonizer to an anti-imperialist, thanks to Pocahontas. How realistic this is, is another question entirely, and further adds to the romanticization of colonialism in *Pocahontas*, however John Smith’s change of heart in the film is directly caused by Pocahontas’ communication skills. He even exclaimed “But this is their land!” when Governor Ratcliffe said the Powhatan’s were lying to John. This clearly indicated how Pocahontas was able to use communication to influence others.

Pocahontas demonstrated negotiation when she attempted to speak with her father:

Pocahontas: Father, I need to speak with you.
 Powhatan: Not now, my daughter. The council is gathering.
 Pocahontas: We don’t have to fight them. There must be a better way.
 Powhatan: Sometimes our paths are chosen for us.
 Pocahontas: But maybe we should try talking to them.
 Powhatan: They do not want to talk.

Pocahontas: But if one of them did want to talk, you would listen to him wouldn't you?

Powhatan: Pocahontas ...

Pocahontas: Wouldn't you?

Powhatan: Of course I would, but it is not that simple. Nothing is simple anymore.

Pocahontas was not included in the council, even though she was the daughter of the Chief. This did not deter her, as she tried to persuade her father to talk to the English. Powhatan made it clear that the English did not want to talk, and therefore neither should they. Having persuaded her father to speak to an Englishman if they were willing to, Pocahontas set off to negotiate with John Smith:

John Smith: Listen to me. My men are planning to attack your people. You've got to warn them.

Pocahontas: Maybe it's not too late to stop this. You have to come with me and talk to my father.

John Smith: Pocahontas, talking isn't going to do any good. I already tried talking to my men, but everything about this land has them spooked.

It seemed that the men in *Pocahontas* refused to communicate and preferred to fight until one dominated the other. Pocahontas, however, seemed to believe that this would be futile, and tried to use her communication skills to negotiate a peaceful outcome. Even with John Smith on her side however, it did not work. Nevertheless, the fact that Pocahontas was persistent with her methods demonstrated her independent and assertive nature.

Pocahontas' negotiation continued to the end of the film, where she made a drastic decision to try and end the conflict. John Smith had been captured and sentenced to death as punishment for the death of Kocoum, the English had arrived to wage war on the Powhatan tribe for capturing and attempting to execute John. Tensions were high with both sides intent on destroying each other, however Pocahontas managed to arrive just in time to save John Smith and end the conflict:

[Powhatan raises his club to execute John Smith, but Pocahontas runs towards him and throws her body over John's.]

Pocahontas: No! *[Powhatan forces himself to stop to save his daughter]* If you kill him you'll have to kill me too.

Powhatan: Daughter, stand back.

Pocahontas: I won't! I love him, father. *[All the men are shocked]* Look around you. This is where the path of hatred has

brought us. This is the path I choose father. What will yours be?

[*Powhatan looks at both armies, the wind surrounds him, presumably his late wife's spirit.*]

Powhatan: [*He holds his club up*] My daughter speaks with a wisdom beyond her years. We have all come here with anger in our hearts ... but she comes with courage and understanding. From this day forward, if there is to be more killing, it will not start with me. [*He turns to a Powhatan warrior*] Release him.

[*Pocahontas and John Smith embrace, and the warriors all put down their weapons.*]

By risking her life to save him, Pocahontas was able to show her father the destruction caused by the two sides. Not only did this solve the issue, but Pocahontas was finally recognized by others for her communication and negotiation (Moffitt 2019: 478–9). Although her motives were partially influenced by her feelings for John, Pocahontas used the opportunity to give an impassioned speech for peace. However, as Lacroix (2004) notes, this scene also stereotypes Pocahontas as the ‘noble savage’, setting her Otherness in direct contrast with John Smith’s Whiteness (225). I still want to acknowledge Pocahontas’ development of communication and negotiation, but it cannot be ignored that these empowered images of femininity are also feeding into racist stereotypes of Native Americans. Pocahontas’ skills in communication and negotiation suggested a progression from the first and second wave. First wave princesses were never in a position to communicate or negotiate with anyone, second wave princesses had reasons to negotiate (for example Jasmine could have attempted to negotiate her father changing the law on her forced marriage) but were never given the opportunity to within their storyline. Therefore, third wave princesses like Pocahontas were a progression towards the representation of stronger heroines. This image of communication continued with Mulan.

An issue with analysing the images of femininity within *Mulan* was that Mulan spent most of the film disguised as a man. As we saw in *Pocahontas*, men did not seem to communicate with others, and this was also reflected in *Mulan*. As outlined in the previous section, Mulan assertively communicated the issues that affected herself and her family when her father was forced to enlist in the army as the only male in the family. However, once she was disguised as a man, her displays of communication were somewhat limited. Nevertheless, Mulan was still able to communicate with other men in the army when they needed support. For example, when Mulan heard her Captain, Li Shang being berated by Chi-Fu, she waited for him to leave the tent and told him that he was a good captain. Li Shang seemed grateful,

yet a little embarrassed, he turned his face back to her as he walked away, acknowledging what she had said. This suggested that Li Shang was not used to men speaking to him in that way but was grateful that Mulan (disguised as Ping) was. Although her dragon, Mushu accused her of liking Li Shang, Mulan insisted she didn't (although her body language suggested she wasn't being truthful). Regardless of Mulan's romantic feelings towards Li Shang, she used communication to provide the support he needed.

Mulan used communication to support Li Shang again when she and the rest of the troop arrived at the village in the Tung Shao pass and realized the rest of the Chinese army had been defeated. When they were searching the village for survivors, they discovered that the General, Li Shang's father, was dead. Li Shang walked away from the rest of the troop with his father's helmet to pay his respects. Seeing his sorrow, Mulan went to comfort him, telling him she was sorry. Again, Li Shang did not say anything, but this time he placed his hand on Mulan's shoulder to express his gratitude for Ping's support. Although Mulan's displays of compassionate communication as Ping were small, it was clear they had an impact on Li Shang. His displays of embarrassment and discomfort indicated that he was not used to talking at a more personal level with other men (Towbin et al 2004: 29), however his response to Mulan's discussions highlighted the impact Mulan had on him in her time disguised as Ping. Within her role as a warrior, Mulan did not have an opportunity to negotiate (although she had tried as a woman to protect her father, unsuccessfully), rather she focused on military combat which I discuss in the next section. Kida continued the image of communication in *Atlantis: The Lost Empire*.

Although Kida was the Princess of Atlantis, it was clear she wanted to take a more active role to improve the lives of Atlanteans. This was indicated when Kida tried to communicate with her father and persuade him to let Milo Thatch and the other explorers help them restore Atlantis:

Kashekim Nedakh:	You know the law Kida. No outsiders may see the city and live.
Kida:	Father ... these people may be able to help us.
Kashekim Nedakh:	We do not need their help.
Kida:	But father ...
Kashekim Nedakh:	That is enough. We will discuss this later.

Like Pocahontas and Mulan, Kida found herself surrounded by men who did not want to communicate. Kida wanted to discuss options with outsiders to restore Atlantis to its former glory, however her father refused. Kida's ability to communicate and her attempt at negotiating with her father to allow the outsiders to stay for one night was successful, which provided Kida the opportunity to question Milo about what he knew about Atlantis.

Ultimately, Kida led Atlantis to flourish again thanks to her negotiation and the way she protected Atlantis under attack.

Communication and negotiation were defining features of the third wave princesses, differentiating them from their predecessors. First wave princesses were never given the opportunity to communicate or negotiate and while second wave princesses developed an assertive nature, they were prevented from progressing their narrative further due to the introduction of a love interest. Perhaps if Ariel hadn't exchanged her voice for legs, literally preventing her from communicating, or Belle hadn't developed feelings for the Beast, and Jasmine had not fallen in love with Aladdin, the second wave could have used communication to fulfil their original desires: exploring the human world, adventure in the great wide somewhere, and freedom from the palace. It was not the physical act of falling in love that caused these women to be unable to communicate or negotiate for their intended desires but falling in love distracted them from their original goal. Third wave princesses, regardless of any romantic feelings they had were able to effectively communicate and negotiate with others to achieve their desired outcome that was outside desiring a romantic relationship with a man.

Leader

Another characteristic that set third wave princesses apart from their predecessors was leadership, their ability to guide or direct others. Through leadership, third wave princesses produced strong and confident images of femininity that had not been seen in the first or second wave, except for Eilonwy (Stover 2013: 4).

Not only did Pocahontas exemplify leadership as an aspect of her femininity, she was also recognized as a leader by others:

- | | |
|-------------|---|
| Powhatan: | When I see you wear that necklace, you look just like your mother. |
| Pocahontas: | I miss her. |
| Powhatan: | But she is still with us. Whenever the wind moves through the trees, I feel her presence. Our people look to her for wisdom and strength. Someday, they will look to you as well. |
| Pocahontas: | I would be honoured by that. |

Pocahontas' own father, and the leader of the Powhatan tribe clearly saw Pocahontas as a leader based on this dialogue. Powhatan's emphasis on Pocahontas' wisdom and strength suggested he regarded them as qualities of leadership, implying that because their people would look to her, she would one day replace him

as chief. Davis (2006) even argued that Pocahontas was just ‘as much a leader of her people as her father, their chief, and in many ways her leadership is even more valuable for her tribe, since she has at her disposal the gift of female intuition’ (184). Pocahontas had demonstrated her skills in diplomacy and continued to do so throughout the conflict (Davis 2006: 184), which again contributed to the image of Pocahontas as a leader.

It was clear Pocahontas took this future position seriously, and when she realized there may have been another way to resolve the conflict between the Powhatan’s and the English, she attempted to persuade her father to communicate with the English colonists rather than fight them. Pocahontas used her assertive communication skills, which demonstrated a strong leadership style based on understanding, listening, and negotiation. Although Powhatan did not truly listen to Pocahontas in this scene, as he was insistent the English wanted to fight, he eventually understood when Pocahontas placed her body in front of John Smith’s to force him to listen to her and save John Smith’s life as discussed in the previous section (England et al 2011: 561). Edwards (1999) argues ‘her show of love and sacrifice stops the battle and engenders a call for peace’ (151). I would go further, as despite not being the official Powhatan leader, Pocahontas influenced her father’s thinking and leadership style to resolve the conflict through communication (England et al 2011: 564) as well as personal sacrifice. Powhatan recognized how Pocahontas had used understanding and wisdom to rectify the situation, rather than the anger used by the men from both sides. It was as a direct result of Pocahontas’ actions that the war waged between the two sides came to a halt, and no lives were lost.

After this moment, Pocahontas seemed to take on an active leadership role within her community, even choosing to stay with her people, rather than travel to England with John Smith. When he asked her to come with him, she turned to her father who reassured her she must choose her own path. She looked at both the Powhatan’s and the English, and stated, “I’m needed here”. Although some have argued that Pocahontas was giving up a future of adventure due to her newfound caring responsibilities (Dundes 2001: 354, 357; England et al 2011: 565), I argue Pocahontas chose to remain with her community to provide the wisdom and strength of a leader, in the same way her mother did. I would suggest Pocahontas’ storyline implied she couldn’t ‘have it all’ – she had to choose between leadership and romance. In Pocahontas’ case, she chose leadership. This set Pocahontas and the third wave princesses apart from previous ones, as third wave princesses were finally being recognized as a leader not only as themselves, but also by others. This was continued by Mulan, both in her disguise as Ping but also within her own right.

Mulan’s demonstration of leadership was slightly more complex. Mulan started the film as a scatter-brained yet assertive woman, however when she

arrived at the army training camp as 'Ping' she had little confidence to carry out her tasks. As Mulan developed into a great warrior, it developed her leadership skills, with her orchestrating the emperor's rescue and defeating Shan Yu (England et al 2011: 561). Therefore, I firstly discuss Mulan's display of a warrior before moving on to her image of leadership.

It took Mulan a long time to adjust to her new life as a soldier, however she was able to test her newfound skills when Mushu accidentally revealed the Chinese Army's location by setting off a cannon in the snowy Tung Shao pass. Realizing where they were, the Huns launched an attack by shooting Li Shang with an arrow. The Chinese army had limited canons left and used them to attack the Huns, but they realized they were outnumbered. When they realized there was only one cannon left, Li Shang instructed Yao to aim it at Shan Yu. However, Mulan saw the reflection of a snowy mountain in her sword and decided to take matters into her own hands. She took the cannon and began running towards the Hun. She aimed, and after several setbacks managed to hit the mountain, causing an avalanche which took out the entire Hun army (Maity 2014: 30). Mulan used her training and quick thinking to provide a better solution for the Chinese army (Clapp-Itnyre 2010: 12; Davis 2006: 197), and through this caused her fellow comrades to follow her rather than Li Shang's orders. Her actions saved the Chinese army, and she earned their respect as a military strategy leader (Youngs 1999: 312):

Li Shang:	Ping. You are the craziest man I've ever met. And for that I owe you my life. From now on, you have my trust.
Ling:	Let's hear it for Ping! The bravest of us all!
Yao:	You're King of the mountain!

Through Mulan's actions as a soldier, she was able to develop skills to lead her comrades when she returned to warn the Chinese army that the Hun had survived the avalanche she orchestrated. Although Mulan realized quickly that she was no longer listened to due to her status as a woman, she persisted in helping her comrades. When the emperor was captured, the remainder of the Chinese army unsuccessfully tried to break down the palace doors. Mulan led them in an alternative direction by having Ling, Yao and Chien-Po dress as concubines. Together, they entered the palace and distracted the guards so Li Shang could get to the emperor. Mulan quickly instructed Chien-Po to take the emperor despite the fact that Li Shang was fighting with Shan Yu. This entire sequence was created and executed thanks to Mulan's leadership (Davis 2006: 197–8; England et al 2011: 561, 564; Limbach 2013: 123). More importantly, her act of leadership was carried out as a woman, rather than a man (Davis 2006: 197; Limbach 2013: 123). This act led to Mulan being offered a seat on the emperor's

council as a woman, although as [Limbach \(2013\)](#) pointed out, the emperor 'offers little change to the social position of women in general' (125). However, she rejected the opportunity to maintain the power she had while dressed as Ping to go home and bring honour to her family ([Davis 2006](#): 201). Mulan was the only princess within the third wave to reject a leadership role, which on the one hand provided a different storyline that focused on family, but on the other denied Mulan further character development that was offered to Pocahontas and Kida. It also suggested that although Mulan saved China and the emperor, the storyline reminded her of her true place in society by having her return home ([Limbach 2013](#): 125). Li Shang followed her and their future romance was heavily implied (and confirmed in the film's sequel) ([Limbach 2013](#): 125–6). Unlike Pocahontas, Mulan could have 'had it all' but her storyline removed the option of leadership from her future even though she had already proved her leadership skills.

In *Atlantis: The Lost Empire*, Kida took a more active leadership role. Not only did she act as a leader, but she was also seen as one by others. In addition to this, because of the powers Atlantis held, Kida was also considered to be the protector of Atlantis, which contributed to her role as a leader within the film.

Kida cares deeply about the people and land of Atlantis, and realized there were issues that needed to be addressed ([Davis 2006](#): 186):

Kashekim Nedakh:	Your heart has softened Kida. A thousand years ago you would have slain them on sight.
Kida:	A thousand years ago the streets were lit ... and our people did not have to scavenge for food at the edge of a crumbling city!
Kashekim Nedakh:	The people are content.
Kida:	They do not know any better! We were once a great people. Now we live in ruins! The Kings of our past would weep if they could see how far we have fallen. [<i>Kida nurses her father, placing a compress on him</i>]
Kashekim Nedakh:	Kida –
Kida:	If these outsiders can unlock the secrets of our past ... perhaps we can save our future.
Kashekim Nedakh:	What they have to teach us we have already learned.
Kida:	Our way of life is dying.
Kashekim Nedakh:	Our way of life is preserved! [<i>He holds her hands and cradles her face</i>] Kida, when you take the throne ... you will understand.

Kida wanted to save her kingdom. It was clear she and her father disagreed, with him wanting things to remain the way they were because the people were content. However, Kida knew the people of Atlantis deserved to live a better life (that they did not know could exist) and wanted to use her social role as a leader to provide that (Davis 2006: 186). She also indicated she was consistently looking at how to improve their future, rather than just preserving their present. This was arguably a sign of leadership as Kida was always trying to be one step ahead, however it was her father that held her back. This changed when Captain Rourke's team turned out to be mercenaries that wanted to exploit Atlantis by stealing its crystal.

When Rourke's true plans were revealed, Kida was chosen by the past leaders of Atlantis to become its protector when it was in a state of peril:

Kashekim Nedakh: She has been chosen like her mother before her.

Milo: What?

[The scene changes to a flashback of a young Kida watching her mother being chosen to protect Atlantis.]

Kashekim Nedakh: In times of danger, the crystal would choose a host, one of royal blood ... to protect itself and its people. It will accept no other.

Although this meant that Kida was granted magical powers to protect Atlantis, it also meant she was unable to function properly as a leader while she was bonded to the crystal. Nevertheless, her father still saw Kida as a leader and asked Milo to save her so she could replace him:

Kashekim Nedakh: If she remains bonded to the crystal ... she could be lost to it forever. The love of my daughter is all I have left. My burden would have become hers when the time was right ... but now it falls to you.

Milo: Me?

Kashekim Nedakh: Return the crystal. Save Atlantis. Save my daughter.

Although he asked Milo to take his place, I argue Kashekim asks Milo to do so for his daughter to replace him as the leader of Atlantis, which was how the film ended. Benhamou (2014b) argued that Milo as the 'white man maintains a privileged position in the film, and ethnic characters "seem to appear for the sake of visual diversity": race does not come up as an issue' (Valdivia 2008: 282) (159). However, although it is Milo that saves Kida, it is Kida who becomes the Queen and leader

of Atlantis, it is also Kida (although immobilized) who is chosen as the protector of Atlantis to enable Milo to defeat Rourke. Although her role was more passive in this instance, I would argue it was still one of the most instrumental. Although Kida did not feature heavily in the film, her presence and character development produced a strong image of leadership. Kida not only wanted to actively protect her people and their future, but she was literally chosen by the crystal to do so. She was recognized as Queen of Atlantis at the end of the film. This was a first in the phenomenon, which was later continued by Elsa and Anna in *Frozen* (2013) and *Frozen II* (2019). In later chapters, I discuss the third wave's representation in the merchandise and theme parks, and how they are often excluded (Kida) or not represented in the same ways as other waves (Pocahontas and Mulan). Interestingly, Kida was never included in the Disney Princess Franchise, despite her royal lineage. However, while I argue Kida is not included most likely due to *Atlantis* not making as much at box office as other films, it cannot be ignored that the three third wave princesses are all women of colour. The third wave demonstrated leadership and assertiveness like never before, with all three women taking active roles in their films, yet these are also the women who I later explain are significantly ignored and excluded within other facets of the phenomenon.

Each third wave princess demonstrated leadership and were seen by others as leaders. Pocahontas negotiated the safety of her people. Although she was assertive, her focus was understanding, and remaining with her people because they needed her (but sacrificing her romance with John Smith). Mulan was credited with saving China. When disguised as Ping, her approach to leadership was focused on dominating the Hun with an aggressive attack. However, as herself, she remained assertive, independent, and self-sufficient during her rescue of the emperor and defeat of Shan Yu, yet when offered a leadership position, she turned it down to be with her family. Kida saved Atlantis and her people. She was independent, self-sufficient, and dominant, while putting her people first. Each of these achievements were acquired by each princess' assertiveness and communication skills that allowed them to guide and direct others through conflict or hardship.

The third wave princesses controlled and shaped their own path and were able to achieve great things as women. This was a far cry from their predecessors. First wave princesses displayed passivity and victimhood, needing to be rescued by others. Second wave princesses, while being assertive and brave, were then distracted by the prospect of romance. Third wave princesses demonstrated how women could be considered as leaders, with or without men at their side (England et al 2011: 565).

Desiring romantic relationships

So far, I have discussed desiring romantic relationships with men as a consistent plotline within a princess film. As I discussed in the previous chapters, first wave princesses often desired a romantic relationship from the very beginning and were often rewarded with one for their passivity. Second wave princesses desired adventure, however once they met their love interest, their adventures were lost within their happily ever after. Third wave princesses, however, did not show any interest or desire in a romantic relationship when they first met other men, and any hinted relationship was suggested as more of an afterthought than a defining feature of this princess' storyline. But, it did seem that the relationship still had a significance within the plot (Garlen and Sandlin 2017: 963). I will be discussing the lack of romantic relationships within the films, how they are 'added on' at the end, and what this suggests about the third wave.

Pocahontas was mainly focused on resolving the conflict between her people and the English. She met John Smith at the beginning of the film, and it was suggested that she developed an attraction towards him when she spoke with Grandmother Willow:

Pocahontas:	What am I doing. I shouldn't be seeing him again. I mean, I want to see him again.
Grandmother Willow:	Who wouldn't? I want to see him again.
Pocahontas:	But still, something inside is telling me it's the right thing.
Grandmother Willow:	Perhaps it's your dream.
Pocahontas:	My dream? Do you think he's the one the spinning arrow was pointing at?

This was the first suggestion that Pocahontas may want to pursue a romantic relationship, however the conversation was still too vague. Because Pocahontas was very curious, she could be suggesting that John Smith could be the answer to some of her questions. Her romantic feelings were made clearer later when Grandmother Willow told both Pocahontas and John, "Don't you see? Only when the fighting stops can you be together". This motivated Pocahontas and John Smith to attempt to resolve the conflict, for the good of their people and for their future relationship (Dundes 2001: 355; Edwards 1999: 157). Towbin et al (2004) have argued that although Pocahontas fell in love with someone from another culture, she still followed a similar plot device of falling in love, 'and while it was not at first sight, this love occurred in one day's time and without even speaking the same language' (38; Edwards 1999: 150; England et al 2011: 565). In the same tone, Edgerton and Jackson (1996) argue 'Pocahontas essentially falls in

love with the first white man she sees' (94). Of course, this was problematic for several reasons. Firstly, it is historically inaccurate, mostly likely because Disney's aim 'was to keep audiences as comfortable as possible by providing a predictable product' (Edgerton and Jackson 1996: 94). Secondly, the choice to include a romantic relationship with a white man further romanticized colonization and the inhumane treatment Pocahontas was subjected to in reality (Edgerton and Jackson 1996: 94). Although, in this chapter, I am exploring how the image of femininity is presented in the third wave, the way Pocahontas' story intersects with racism, colonialism, and historical inaccuracies must be acknowledged in the analysis.

Therefore, in *Pocahontas*, where the Disney studio once again chose to use a romantic relationship as a plot device to drive the story, it could be argued that Pocahontas' motives to solve the conflict were motivated by her desire to be with John Smith. I would counter that she was also able to see the bigger picture and wanted to solve the conflict to bring peace. In addition, wanting both a romantic relationship and to resolve a conflict should not be considered disempowering. Pocahontas should not have to choose, but the fact she has interests outside of a relationship and actively chooses them was a huge progression for the princess phenomenon.

Once the conflict was resolved, and John Smith asked Pocahontas to come with him to England, Pocahontas declined and said, "I'm needed here". Her decision to remain has been suggested as her placing 'the needs of her own people over her own desires' (Lacroix 2004: 224–5), despite this, Pocahontas' rejection of both Kocoum and John Smith demonstrated a transgression in matrimonial goals and desires (Bradford 2012: 180; Henke et al 1996: 240–1; Stover 2013: 4; Zarranz 2007: 58). Although it has been suggested that Pocahontas' actions to bring peace between the Powhatan's and the English colonists were 'driven by her passion for a man who was leaving, the possibility that she decided to stay to be an activist is both undeveloped and unlikely' (Dundes 2001: 361). Dundes goes on to argue that Pocahontas' desire for leadership was not clear enough, and instead sacrifices her own needs for the needs of others (Condis 2015: 37; Dundes 2001: 361). However, another explanation for this could be that although Pocahontas loved John Smith and would miss him, she did not need him to function as a leader or member of her community (Davis 2006: 184). Seybold (2021) offers another perspective, that Pocahontas was listening to her father's original advice, 'instead staying and taking her proper place among her father's people' (72). I would argue when Pocahontas looked between her people and John's, she realized her communication and negotiation skills would be needed to forge a new path for her people and the colonists (Davis 2006: 184). My argument echoes that of Edwards (1999), who also suggested 'Pocahontas stays behind to maintain peace, facilitating bonds between the Powhatans and the English based on the Pocahontas-Smith inspiration of interracial

love and sacrifice' (151) and Davis (2006), who argued 'Pocahontas rejects love – which would mean leaving behind her people and her function as a leader – and chooses to devote herself to her people' (184). This does mean, however, that Pocahontas is a princess who could not have it all, and as Lacroix (2004) has suggested, it is not unexpected that the first biracial couple in a Disney Princess film 'do not walk off into the fairytale sunset as husband and wife' (225), it does suggest that Disney Princesses prioritize things over a romantic relationship, which had not been done before. However, as we know this is historically inaccurate, and this must be acknowledged. This is not Pocahontas' true story. This is the story that Disney has chosen to tell. And while that is the story we are examining here; it cannot be ignored that once again Disney romanticized Pocahontas' true experiences with English colonizers. She was the only third wave princess to decline the assumed proposal of a romantic relationship (Davis 2006: 184; Dundes 2001: 353–4), remaining and developing her role as a cultural mediator (Edwards 1999: 157) in this fictional story created by Disney, ignoring the atrocities of English colonialism and the true fate of Pocahontas (Lee-Oliver 2020).

Mulan did not display any interest in pursuing a romantic relationship with any men she met during her time in the army, even though as a woman, it was her duty to make a match (Whelan 2012: 30). Although it was hinted that she was attracted to her Captain, Li Shang; Mulan made no romantic gesture towards him during the film. Mulan was more focused on keeping her identity secret, saving China, and restoring honour to her family. At the end of the film, Li Shang also hinted that he was attracted to her, but seemed to be quite daunted by Mulan's presence. After Mulan was honoured by the emperor, Li Shang simply stated, "you fight good". Mulan seemed disappointed by this, replying "oh ... thank you". This only seemed to be a fleeting emotion for Mulan, as she was intent to return to her family to tell them what she achieved. It wasn't until Li Shang was encouraged by the emperor himself that he visited the Fa residence in search of Mulan. He was again very nervous around her and her father, whereas Mulan who had gained confidence thanks to her experiences asked him, "Would you like to stay for dinner?", indicating a romantic relationship may come to fruition after all. This could suggest that princess plot lines must still rely on some form of romantic relationship, despite the princess' other achievements (Maity 2014: 30; Mitchell-Smith 2012: 220). However, this was set away from Mulan's triumph as a warrior and seems to be suggested as more of an afterthought at the end of the film or a reward for her 'efforts in the battlefield' (Youngs 1999: 312), rather than the film's 'happily ever after'; it could also be interpreted as Mulan being reminded of her true role to form a romantic relationship at the end of the film (Dundes and Streiff 2016: 1; Limbach 2013: 125; Mitchell-Smith 2012: 220; Seybold 2021: 72). However, because the majority of the film focuses on her bringing honour to her family,

not through a relationship but through saving the emperor, defeating Shan Yu, and therefore saving China, this was potentially changing the meaning of how women can bring honour to their family. The romantic relationship was merely an afterthought, implying women can have both.

Like Mulan, Kida also showed no interest in a romantic relationship. Instead, she was focused on ensuring the survival and improvement of her kingdom. She indicated no signs of attraction or romantic feelings to any men throughout the film. However, when she detached herself from Atlantis' crystal, floated back down and became conscious, she and Milo held hands. The expedition funder, Mr Whitmore, learnt Milo chose to stay in Atlantis through a picture of him and Kida holding hands, which also indicated the development of a relationship. However, as Davis argued, it was Milo who chose to stay behind in Atlantis. Unlike Pocahontas, there was no question 'that Kida might consider leaving her people to be with Milo ... she is a leader, so she remains with her people. It is Milo who must decide, and it is Milo who chooses love over returning to the surface and becoming the hero who discovered Atlantis' (Davis 2006: 188). For the first time within the princess phenomenon, it was a man who must choose between his life elsewhere and pursuing a romantic relationship. For Kida, as Queen and leader of Atlantis, that choice wouldn't even spring to mind. Like Mulan, Kida's relationship was not confirmed, and was certainly not a feature of her character development or plotline. The presumed relationship is an afterthought added at the end once Kida had saved Atlantis.

This brings me to the question, why did Disney filmmakers choose to include a romantic relationship at all? None of the princesses within the third wave demonstrated any interest in love (unlike the first wave). They did not have clear dreams or aspirations (unlike the second wave), they were leaders who focused on issues at hand. Therefore, the relationships possibly acted as a form of policing. Pocahontas had to choose between her relationship with John Smith and leading her people. Mulan rejected a place on the emperor's council to return home, a prompt reminder of where she truly belonged within Chinese society. While she had restored honour to her family by saving China as a woman, the introduction of the romantic relationship at the end of the film was more of an afterthought, changing the way that women can bring honour to their family. However, it was still a stark reminder that she may have saved China, but her true role was to marry (Henke 2008: 134). It was only Kida who was able to lead Atlantis *and* have a relationship with a man, because he was the one to give up his life in America to stay with her. Although Pocahontas and Mulan were unable to because their storyline did not allow it; Kida was able to 'have it all'. However, Kida is also not included in the Disney Princess Franchise and is therefore much less known to audiences that would be able to make meaning from this story surrounding women being able to have it all. In

this case, the most empowered princess Disney had created so far was being ignored and excluded from the highly popular Disney Princess Franchise.

This was a very different image of womanhood than the previous waves. First wave princesses were passive dreamers, they knew their desire, but did nothing to achieve it. The desires themselves were solely romantic, with them being rewarded for passivity with a romantic relationship. Second wave princesses were lost dreamers, they desired adventure, but those desires soon became lost when they met a man. Their dreams of adventure were lost within the happily ever after they were granted in the film. Third wave princesses, however, did not seem to have dreams at all (apart from Pocahontas, who literally dreamt a cryptic dream about a spinning arrow), rather they actively dealt with issues they faced and led themselves on a journey of self-discovery (Heatwole 2016: 5). They had romance at the end of their narrative, but it was often produced as an afterthought, simply added on to their story (perhaps to remind them of their expectations). Therefore, I call third wave princesses ‘active leaders’. Here, a princess’ story is not being defined by a man or a romantic relationship, it was being defined by the princess herself and the way she approaches challenges.

Conclusion

I identified the third wave as ‘active dreamers’. Pocahontas, Mulan, and Kida were able to stand up for themselves and others; communicate and negotiate to get their desires met and demonstrated leadership. Although romance was still included within each film, it seemed to only be focused on at the end. Although the lack of romance during the main parts of the film allowed the third wave to flourish in their own skills, the return of prospective relationships at the end often resulted in the princesses having to choose between leadership and romance (except for Kida). Nevertheless, the lack of romance was another change the third wave brought to the phenomenon. As the third wave films were produced in the same period as the second, Pocahontas, Mulan and Kida’s assertiveness was perhaps also a wider reflection of the progression of women’s roles within society. However, as I have discussed in this chapter, the third wave continued to build on their development through characteristics such as communication, negotiation, and leadership.

The third wave princesses continued to transgress from the first, displaying traits such as assertiveness by standing up against imperialism and patriarchy on behalf of themselves and others. And, in the case of Pocahontas and Kida, their display of assertiveness was followed by respect from men. Pocahontas actively dismantled John Smith’s imperial attitudes through her assertiveness and communication skills. Mulan defied tightly bound gender norms by standing up to her father and then making the decision to protect him by

going to war in his place. Kida commanded respect from Milo and his team when they arrived in Atlantis, even committing an act of violence to do so. The third wave built on the second's image of rebellion and bravery through the trait of leadership. They did not have to rebel, as they themselves were in power. Pocahontas single-handedly resolved the conflict between the Powhatan's and the English colonists, even rejecting a relationship with John Smith to continue her leadership role. Mulan not only managed to defeat most of the Hun, but saved the emperor, killed Shan Yu, and saved China thanks to her leadership skills. Kida demanded more for the people of Atlantis, and literally saved it when she was chosen by the crystal to protect her land. Third wave princesses may have had help and support to carry out their quests, but it was the princess at the helm.

This newfound agency for the princesses did have its consequences. Like the second wave, these women were not driven by romance, yet it was still introduced as a means of policing the princess' behaviour. Pocahontas and Kida were able to defy being policed, whereas Mulan chose to return home. Pocahontas' and Mulan's behaviour was policed at the end of the film through a romantic relationship. Pocahontas chose to remain with her people rather than go to England with John Smith. After Mulan became one of the best warriors in the Chinese Army; saved China; and was offered a place on the emperor's Council she respectfully declined and returned home to her family, depicting a sense of familial duty. She received the validation she needed from her father, and Li Shang arrived at their house, and it was implied a romantic relationship would bloom. Both scenarios demonstrated their inability to have it all. If Pocahontas wanted to be a leader, she had to give up her relationship with John Smith. While Mulan had achieved greatness, her return home rooted her firmly back in her life before she was a warrior, and through Li Shang's arrival she was reminded that to truly bring honour she must marry well. For Pocahontas and Mulan, it seemed you either cannot have it all (Pocahontas), and if you tried you would be reminded of your place within societal structure (Mulan). Again, romantic relationships were being used to punish the princesses for transgressing, forcing them to choose between leadership and romance. Pocahontas chose leadership and denied herself of a romantic relationship with a man, whereas Mulan rejected leadership to return home to her family, where Li Shang arrived to imply their courtship. Kida differed from this. She became a leader at the end of the film, and her romance with Milo was subtly implied at the end (there was no significant romantic storyline that drove the plot), but that did not change her role as Queen of Atlantis. Kida was not forced to choose between a relationship and leadership due to her transgressions. However, Kida is a non-franchised princess of colour. It is significant that one of the non-franchised princesses (who is also a princess of colour), who will receive less marketing, less merchandise, and less exposure to consumers,

is the one who was truly able to 'have it all'. Meanwhile, princesses whose behaviour was policed, and who are forced to choose between leadership and love, were included within the Disney Princess Franchise. However, the overall treatment of the third wave princesses, as discussed later in this book begs the question, why has Disney portrayed princesses of colour as 'strong, America feminist protagonists' (Henke 2008: 134), but then does not include them in as much merchandise and consumer experiences as other predominantly white waves?

The third wave princesses were reflective of more American women entering the public sphere in roles such as the first female attorney general and the first female Secretary of State. The leadership demonstrated by the third wave could have been seen as a cultural mirror for the progression of American women (Mollet 2020: 108). This brought a new challenge to the third wave, where the princess would have to choose between leadership and romance (apart from Kida), which possibly highlighted the sacrifices that women in leadership roles may have made to 'make it to the top'.

‘Sacrificing Dreamers’: A Regression in the Disney Princess Phenomenon

The fourth wave of princess films were released in 2009 and 2010. Women’s roles and rights had continued to progress. Within the military, women served America in the Afghanistan War from 2001 to 2014, and in Iraq from 2003 to 2011. Ann Dunwoody became the first woman four-star general in 2008 ([Army News Service 2008](#)). Within government, women continued to progress into higher positions. In 2001, Elaine Chao was the first Asian American woman appointed to the Cabinet, her role being the Secretary of Labor ([Bush White House n.d.](#)). In 2007, Nancy Pelosi was the first woman speaker of the House ([Pelosi n.d.](#)). Hillary Clinton was the first woman to be nominated by a major political party but lost the overall nomination to Barack Obama ([MacAskill and Goldenberg 2008](#)). However, Hillary Clinton, like Republican Sarah Palin, had to deal with significant sexism in their 2008 campaigns ([Carlin and Winfrey 2009](#)). In 2009, Judy Chu was elected to the House of Representatives, she was the first Chinese American woman to serve in Congress (Chu n.d.). On the Republican side, Sarah Palin became the first woman to run for vice president ([Barnes and Shear 2008](#)). Within the legislature, abortion remained an ever-present issue, with Congress passing the Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act in 2003, criminalizing performing an abortion once the baby is being delivered ([Congress 2003](#)). In 2009, The Lily Ledbetter Fair Pay Restoration Act was passed to support victims (who were often women) of pay discrimination ([Congress 2009](#)). However, there was also stagnation and regression. In 2005 Hurricane Katrina caused devastating financial damage and took many lives, with the victims of the natural disaster being mostly African-American ([Mollet 2020: 105](#)). In 2007 and 2008, the financial crisis ‘hit African-Americans especially hard’, once again excluding people of colour from the American Dream ([Mollet 2020: 106](#)). In 2008, Barack Obama became the first African

American man to be elected President of the United States, and Michelle Obama became the first African American woman to serve as First Lady of the United States. Although this did not erase the barriers people of colour had and continued to be facing, it certainly started to progress things in the right direction.

Within the Disney Company, Michael Eisner retired as CEO, with Robert Iger replacing him ([The Walt Disney Company 2005](#)). As CEO he subsequently purchased Pixar studios and bought the rights to *Oswald the Lucky Rabbit* – the first cartoon that Walt had created and realized that he did not own the rights to his creation until later. This led to Walt Disney being very protective over his future creations ([Christensen 2006](#)). In 2009, Disney purchased the rights to Marvel Entertainment, allowing them to widen their entertainment outlets ([Clark 2009](#)).

The Princess and the Frog was released in 2009 with a worldwide gross of \$267,045,765, improving the princess films since the release of *Atlantis* ([Box Office Mojo n.d.k](#)). *The Princess and the Frog* also introduced Disney's first African American princess. This was also the 'first year and term of President Barack Obama, the first Black president of the United States' ([Moffitt 2019](#): 471). For Moffitt, Tiana's story 'embodied tremendous optimism and affirmation of a postracial America that highlighted the evolution of racial progress still unactualized' ([2019](#): 471). Likewise, [Benhamou \(2014b\)](#) argued 'if Tiana was marketed as the first African American Disney princess, the film both addresses and erases blackness' (160). Although they present Tiana as a Black woman who works hard to achieve her dreams, Disney barely scratches the surface of the wider structures working against Tiana and her ambitions due to the period the film is set in ([Gehlawat 2010](#): 417, 420): 'segregation is only subtly suggested and smoothed down', 'white characters may be wealthy, but they are harmless and comic: their power is not questioned', and the only person to question it is the film's villain, Dr Facilier ([Benhamou 2014b](#): 160). This was particularly frustrating, as *The Princess and the Frog* featured the first African American Disney Princess, sending a message that 'Black girls, too, are able to be (and worthy of being) princesses' ([Moffitt 2019](#): 472). While this could have been a powerful moment for the Disney Princess Phenomenon and audiences of it, Tiana being a frog for the majority of the film ([Dundes and Streiff 2016](#): 1; [Gregory 2010](#): 433; [Steinhoff 2017](#): 165), 'rendering Tiana's Black body and princess status invisible' was deeply problematic ([Moffitt 2019](#): 471).¹ As a human, Tiana is featured for 29 minutes at the beginning of the film, she is then a frog for 59 minutes, and only reappears as a human again for the last three and a half minutes ([Turner 2013](#): 90) of the 97 minute film running time. *The Princess and the Frog* was unable to reach the top ten ([Box Office Mojo](#)

n.d.k). The following year, *Tangled* was able to return the Disney Princess films into the top ten worldwide grossing films, at \$592,461,732 (Box Office Mojo n.d.l).

Fourth wave characteristics

As outlined in the first, second, and third wave chapters, I identified several characteristics in the fourth wave films. I recorded each princesses speech, movement, narrative, and plot lines. Tiana was presented as a chef, hardworking, determined, focused, entrepreneurial, ambitious, self-sacrificing, driven, assertive, negotiator, quick thinking, teacher, industrious, desiring a romantic relationship. She was seen by others as a chef, hardworking, should be desiring a romantic relationship, belittled, beautiful, too serious, self-sacrificing. Rapunzel was depicted as domestic, inquisitive, desires more from her life, abused, dreamer, quick thinking, negotiator, determined, assertive, having magical powers, desiring a romantic relationship, self-sacrificing. Other characters saw Rapunzel as someone to belittle, incapable, in need of protection, someone to manipulate, assertive, easy to abuse, a commodity, and a leader.

Overall, I identified 32 characteristics across both films, with Tiana and Rapunzel sharing four characteristics. The fourth wave continued their assertive nature and desire for romance, but also introduced new characteristics: determination and self-sacrifice. Both princesses were determined to fulfil their dreams, but ultimately sacrificed them for a romantic relationship. This moved away from the independence of the third wave, and back towards the reliance and desire for a romantic relationship of the first and second wave.

Determined

Fourth wave princesses produced a new image of femininity: determination. Both Tiana and Rapunzel were motivated to achieve their respective desires: open a restaurant (Moffitt 2019: 472) and see the floating lights (Mollet 2020: 108). Although previous princesses such as Ariel had dreams, they were not motivated to achieve them until a love interest was introduced, and once they pursued a romantic relationship their dreams were long forgotten. I define determination as the mindset to achieve a known desire under any circumstances. As I have discussed in previous chapters, I defined first wave princesses as passive dreamers for knowing their desire to have a romantic relationship but doing nothing to achieve it. Second wave princesses were defined as lost dreamers, as their desire for adventure was lost when they met their love interest. Third wave princesses did not seem to have any specific desires but were reactive to

circumstances. I described them as active leaders. Their story was not defined by a love interest, it was defined by their leadership and the way they solved issues. Due to Tiana and Rapunzel having such strong desires to achieve their dreams, I originally identified fourth wave princesses as active dreamers: women who knew what they wanted and would do what it took to achieve it. This was particularly highlighted through the image of determination.

The audience learns that since she was a young girl, it had been Tiana's dream to open her own restaurant, much like her father.² Although she wished on the evening star as a child, her father told her that she had to work hard to achieve her dreams, wishes were insufficient. As we saw the room transition from a young Tiana's to a teenage Tiana's, the audience learnt she was working multiple jobs through her schedule and outfit changes:

[Tiana comes through her bedroom door, exhausted.]

Tiana: Well Miss Tiana, rough night for tips, but every little penny counts. *[She pushes the 'restaurant fund' jar against the many others]* Don't you worry Daddy. We'll be there soon. *[She kisses the photo of her veteran father. She falls asleep for a few seconds before her alarm goes off]* Goodnight Cal's. *[She returns one uniform in her wardrobe and picks out another]* Good morning, Duke's.

Tiana continued her and her father's dream alone after his death, using her tips to save money for her own restaurant (Gehlawat 2010: 421). She seemed to have quite a lot of money saved up, which indicated she was either working multiple jobs or all possible hours. Her limited rest in the scene also suggested that she did not take time off. Her outfit changes solidified the idea that Tiana had more than one job and was working the maximum hours she could at both roles. This became clearer when she declined a social invitation to continue working:

Tiana: You know I got two left feet. Besides, I'm ... *[She attends to a customer]* You need a napkin sweetheart? I'm going to work a double shift tonight. *[She attends to another customer]* Here are your hotcakes. You know, so I can –

Friend: So you can save for your restaurant. I know, I know. Girl, all you ever do is work.

[The service bell rings.]

Burford: Order up!

Tiana: Maybe next time.

Friend: I told y'all she wouldn't come!

Her friend's use of "I told y'all she wouldn't come!" suggested Tiana was regularly turning down social events to work (England et al 2011: 563). It was now clearer Tiana was working double shifts at two jobs to save up enough money to open her own restaurant. These decisions highlighted how hardworking and determined Tiana was to achieve her dream. On the other hand, it also highlights issues with the representation of Black women within *The Princess and the Frog*. Moffitt (2019) argues the film's attention on the work roles of both Tiana and her mother Eudora (a seamstress) 'draws from the historic expectation for Black women to work in subservient roles' (479). So although Tiana's working hours may reflect her determination to open her own restaurant and increase her social mobility, they are also highlighting Tiana's lack of social mobility due to the racist and discriminatory structure she was living in. Throughout the film in her human form, Tiana is regularly depicted as a Black body at work, without truly acknowledging the structures that have enforced that upon her (Moffitt 2019: 479). It is also highlighted in the wider scenery, where at the beginning of the film the audience is shown a young Tiana and her mother travel from 'Big Daddy La Bouff's mansion in the Garden Section of New Orleans' to the 'Ninth Ward shotgun style home of Tiana and her parents without questioning or problematizing the socio-economic disparity or difference encoded within the streetcar journey between the two' (Turner 2013: 85). The lack of recognition of discrimination, prejudice and inequality is deeply problematic. This continues throughout the film, with people being concerned that she works too much, but there is little consideration as to why that might be.

Many others, including her mother were concerned she was working too hard. When Tiana finally earned enough money to put a down payment on the old sugar mill for her restaurant, her mother Eudora expressed her concerns:

- Eudora: Baby cakes, I'm sure this place is going to be wonderful, but it's a shame you are working so hard.
- Tiana: But how can I let up now when I'm so close? I got to make sure all Daddy's hard work means something.
- Eudora: Tiana. Your Daddy may not have gotten the place he always wanted, but he had something better. He had love. And that's all I want for you sweetheart, to meet your Prince Charming and dance off into your happily ever after.
- Tiana: Mama! I don't have time for dancing. [*Singing*] That's gonna have to wait a while.
- Eudora: How long we talking about here?
- Tiana: Ain't got time for messing around, and it's not my style.
- Eudora: I want some grandkids!
- Tiana: This whole town can slow you down

People takin' the easy way
 But I know exactly where I am going
 Gettin closer 'n closer every day
 And I am almost there.

This example supports [Moffitt's \(2019\)](#) argument around Tiana's representation as a Black woman, where wider discriminatory structures around Tiana's overworking are not considered to make the narrative 'palatable to Disney's mainstream audiences' (479). However, these offers of concern did not deter Tiana, in fact she demonstrated her determination further by rejecting them completely ([Mollet 2020](#): 112). It must be said that Tiana had made some significant sacrifices to achieve her dream, especially at the age of 18. This was problematic as Tiana was not allowing herself to rest. However, Eudora's concern was that Tiana would not meet her 'Prince Charming' if she was working so hard. Within the film at least, Tiana had made no suggestion that she desired a romantic relationship at this time in her life, especially in comparison to her friend Charlotte ([Clapp-Itnyre 2010](#): 14). Tiana did not want distractions ([Clapp-Itnyre 2010](#): 14; [Mitchell-Smith 2012](#): 217; [Moffitt 2019](#): 478; [Stover 2013](#): 7), she was so focused and driven towards achieving her dream that she would even take drastic action.

When she was told that someone had made a bigger offer on the sugar mill, Tiana was heartbroken. She saw the evening star and with lost hope, wished upon it. It was here she met Prince Naveen, who had been turned into a frog by the Shadow Man (the film's antagonist). Under the impression that Tiana was a princess, he explained that she must kiss him to turn him back into a human. Tiana was reluctant to do this until Naveen suggested, "I also happen to come from a fabulously wealthy family. Surely, I could offer you some type of reward, a wish I could grant, perhaps?". Tiana looked back at the photo of Tiana's Place from her childhood and decided to kiss Naveen to outbid the other offer. However, this backfired and turned Tiana into a frog, as she was not a real princess. When Naveen revealed to her that he was turned into a frog by the Shadow Man, she chastised herself for getting involved: "It serves me right for wishing on stars. The only way to get what you want in this world is through hard work". This illustrated how focused and determined Tiana was to achieve her dreams. She immediately tried to think of a plan to get herself and Naveen back to their human form. As they spent their first night as frogs hiding from alligators, in the morning Tiana built a raft to take them back to New Orleans. They met a kinder alligator, Louis, who agreed to take them to Mama Odie for a spell. The trio discussed what they would do when they became human, Louis would be able to play his music without frightening humans, Naveen

would continue his party and womanizing lifestyle, until Tiana reminded him of his promise to her – to marry Charlotte and give her the money for her restaurant:

Tiana: I’ve worked hard for everything I’ve got
And that’s the way it’s supposed to be
When I’m a human being
At least I’ll act like one
If you do your best each and every day
Good things are sure to come your way
What you give is what you get
My daddy said that and I’ll never forget.

Tiana once again repeated her hard work ethic to herself and others. It also highlighted the division of labour between Tiana and Naveen. Despite Naveen being the root of Tiana’s issues, it was Tiana’s responsibility to return them to their human form, she drove the plot and Naveen seemed to just ‘tag along’ (Davis 2014: 51; Whelan 2012: 31). She continued this when she met Mama Odie, who told Tiana she needed to ‘dig a little deeper’ to find out what she needed. Mama Odie was suggesting that Tiana should realize her feelings for Naveen and pursue a romantic relationship with him, however this thought had not even crossed Tiana’s mind:

Mama Odie: Well Miss Froggy, do you understand now child?
Tiana: Yes I do Mama Odie. I need to dig a little deeper and
work even harder to get my restaurant!
[Everyone sighs and groans, disappointed Tiana has not understood the message.]

Even though everyone seemed to be insisting that Tiana should focus on a romantic relationship instead of getting enough money for her restaurant, Tiana continued to ignore them. This was a problematic trope within Tiana’s storyline. Tiana was the first princess who had a clear desire *and* actively pursued it. Although second wave princesses had a clear desire, once a love interest was introduced, they became distracted. Third wave princesses, while not having a specific desire, were very active leaders. Tiana was focused and driven to opening a restaurant (Stover 2013: 3), but her family, friends and even Mama Odie were trying to deter her from it. This suggested women should be focusing on pursuing a relationship rather than a career. For now, this did not affect Tiana’s aspirations, which is why I identified Tiana as an active dreamer.

Although Rapunzel shared determination, it was for an entirely different desire. Taken from her royal home as a baby by Mother Gothel, Rapunzel had only known life within the tower she grew up in. She made it clear

she was unsatisfied with her mundane life in the tower during ‘When Will My Life Begin?’. She finished the song by identifying her desire of seeing the floating lights that appear in the sky only on her birthday. She decided that when Mother Gothel returned home, she would finally ask her to take her to see them:

Rapunzel: Mother, I’m turning eighteen. And I wanted to ask, what I really want for this birthday. Actually what I want for every birthday ...

Mother Gothel: Rapunzel please, stop with the mumbling. You know how I feel about the mumbling. Blah, blah, blah, blah. It’s very annoying. I’m just teasing, you’re adorable I love you so much darling.

[*Rapunzel pauses, but her chameleon sidekick Pascal encourages her.*]

Rapunzel: Oh! I want to see the floating lights!

Mother Gothel: What?

Rapunzel: Oh. Well I was hoping you would take me to see the floating lights.

Mother Gothel: Oh, you mean the stars.

Rapunzel: That’s the thing. I’ve charted stars and they’re always constant. But these, they appear every year on my birthday, Mother. Only on my birthday. And I can’t help but feel that they’re, they’re meant for me. I need to see them, Mother. And not just from my window. In person. I have to know what they are.

It was clear Rapunzel had plucked up quite a lot of courage to ask her mother to take her to see the floating lights. Even though Mother Gothel belittled and tried to deter Rapunzel, she was still determined to ask her mother to take her. When Flynn Rider appeared in the tower to hide from palace guards, she knocked him unconscious and put him in a closet to prove to her mother she was capable of looking after herself. This is also another image of violence from a Disney Princess, following Kida from the third wave and Tiana from the fourth – demonstrating their difference from the first and second wave. When she tried to tell Mother Gothel what she had done, Gothel lost her patience and forbade Rapunzel from leaving the tower. Realizing she was running out of options for seeing the floating lights, she used the opportunity to get Gothel out of the tower to go without her:

Rapunzel: Okay, I’ve been thinking a lot about what you said earlier.

Mother Gothel: I hope you’re not still talking about the stars.
Rapunzel: Floating Lights, and, yes, I’m leading up to that.
[*She walks towards the closet containing Flynn Rider*]
Mother Gothel: Because I really thought we dropped the issue
sweetheart.
Rapunzel: No Mother, I’m just saying, you think I’m not
strong enough to handle myself out there.
Mother Gothel: Oh darling, I know you’re not strong enough to
handle yourself out there.
Rapunzel: But if you just –
Mother Gothel: Rapunzel, we’re done talking about this.
Rapunzel: But trust me, I –
Mother Gothel: Rapunzel.
Rapunzel: Know what I’m – [*Rapunzel places her hand on the
chair keeping the closet closed*]
Mother Gothel: Rapunzel.
Rapunzel: Oh, come on.
Mother Gothel: Enough with the lights, Rapunzel! You are not
leaving this tower, EVER!
[*Rapunzel looks defeated and removes her hand from the chair.*]
Mother Gothel: Oh, great. Now I’m the bad guy.
Rapunzel: [*She looks at her painting of the floating lights*] All I was
gonna say, mother is that ... I know what I want
for my birthday now.
Mother Gothel: And what is that?
Rapunzel: New paint. That paint from the white shells you
once brought me.
Mother Gothel: Well that is a very long trip, Rapunzel. Almost three
days’ time.
Rapunzel: I just thought it was a better idea than the stars.

Rapunzel insisted on seeing the floating lights, however when Mother Gothel banned her from leaving the tower she realized she must try another way. Although the audience did not see Rapunzel’s inner thoughts, it was clear that in this scene when she glanced at her painting of the floating lights, she decided getting Mother Gothel out of the tower for three days would give her enough time to leave to see them. She appeased Gothel’s desires by asking for paint, meaning she would be left alone, and used the word ‘stars’ instead of lights to fool Gothel into thinking she had surrendered her desire.

In fact, it was quite the opposite. She negotiated with Flynn Rider that she would return his satchel containing the stolen crown once he took her to see the floating lights (Davis 2014: 51; Whelan 2012: 31–2). He

eventually agreed and Rapunzel was able to leave her tower with a guide. It was clear she was very torn about leaving, but her determination helped her to continue her journey. Flynn Rider recognized the angst she was experiencing about leaving and betraying her mother and attempted to manipulate Rapunzel:

- Flynn Rider: You know, I can't help but notice, you seem a little at war with yourself here.
- Rapunzel: What?
- Flynn Rider: Now, I'm only picking up bits and pieces. Over-protective mother, forbidden road trip. This is serious stuff. But let me ease your conscience. This is part of growing up. A little rebellion, a little adventure. That's good, healthy even.
- Rapunzel: [Laughs] You think?
- Flynn Rider: I know. You're way overthinking this. Trust me. Does your mother deserve it? No. Would this break her heart and crush her soul? Of course. But you just got to do it.
- Rapunzel: Break her heart?
- Flynn Rider: In half.
- Rapunzel: Crush her soul?
- Flynn Rider: Like a grape.
- Rapunzel: She would be heartbroken, you're right.
- Flynn Rider: I am, aren't I? Oh, bother. Alright, I can't believe I'm saying this, but ... I'm letting you out of the deal.
- Rapunzel: What?
- Flynn Rider: That's right. But don't thank me. Let's just turn around, and you go home. Here's your frog. I get back my satchel. You get back a mother daughter relationship based on mutual trust and voila! We part ways as unlikely friends.
- Rapunzel: No. I am seeing those lanterns.

Rapunzel did not allow Flynn to manipulate her into returning to her tower and returning his satchel. Although she knew that her mother would be hurt by this, she continued her quest to see the floating lights. Like Tiana, although there were multiple people trying to prevent or dissuade her from her dream, Rapunzel continued regardless, demonstrating her determination. This was like the adventurous and curious nature of the second wave, yet Tiana and Rapunzel did not allow themselves to become distracted (until the end of the film, which I discuss in the last section).

Assertive

Fourth wave princesses also displayed images of assertiveness. As in previous chapters, I define assertiveness as a confident person who can stand up for themselves and others in a clear and effective manner. Like the third wave, Tiana and Rapunzel demonstrated assertiveness through their communication with other men. Notably, Rapunzel also demonstrated assertiveness with Mother Gothel as she gained more freedom.

Tiana illustrated her assertive nature during her communication with Prince Naveen. When she first met him as a talking frog, she was terrified. However, when she was turned into a frog herself, and narrowly managed to escape being eaten by alligators, she displayed her assertiveness:

Naveen: Well waitress, looks like we're going to be here for a while.
So, we may as well get ... [*flirtatious*] comfortable.
[*A sound is made as if Tiana has hit him, and Naveen groans with pain.*]
Tiana: Get your slimy self away from me!

This interaction was similar to Kida and one of the explorers in *Atlantis: The Lost Empire*. It was more explicit in *The Princess and the Frog* that Naveen was trying to flirt with Tiana, although this time we did not see Tiana commit an act of violence, it was assumed. This suggested that Tiana would not allow men to speak to her in that way, nor allow them to touch her without her consent. It was also interesting, that despite Naveen knowing Tiana's name, as she revealed it when trying to stop a dog named Stella from eating them, he continued to call her 'waitress'. This highlighted the intersectional nature of Tiana's identity, not only is Tiana's gender, ethnicity, and social class discriminated against and commented on by businessmen in New Orleans (as I will discuss), it is now being manifested in Naveen's refusal to call her by her own name. His insistence on calling her waitress is dehumanizing, and once again demonstrates the multiple layers of discrimination that Tiana faces in the film. Naveen's disrespect of her status may be another reason why she chose to hit him. Her assertive attitude towards Naveen was continued throughout their journey. Another example of Tiana's assertiveness was when Naveen accused her of not being able to have fun:

[*Tiana is slashing through the leaves with a stick, so they have a clear pathway.*]
Naveen: You know, waitress, I have finally figured out what is wrong with you.
Tiana: Have you now? [*She continues making a path*]
Naveen: You do not know how to have fun. There. Somebody had to say it.

- Tiana: Thank you, cause I figured out what your problem is too.
[*She pushes a large branch back*]
- Naveen: I'm too wonderful? [*She seemingly lets it go off screen, winding him*]
- Tiana: No, you're a no-'count, philandering, lazy bump on a log.
- Naveen: [*Coughs*] Killjoy.
- Tiana: What d'you say?
- Naveen: Nothing. [*Coughs*] Stick in the mud.
- Tiana: Listen here, mister. [*She places her finger on his chest, pushing him*] This stick in the mud has had to work two jobs her whole life while you've been sucking on a silver spoon chasing chamber maids round y- your ivory tower!

So far, all Naveen had done was insult, mock, and annoy Tiana on their journey together. A Prince who had been cut off from his family's money unless he married, Naveen had lived a life of luxury. Tiana was a working-class Black woman who had to constantly work (harder than anyone else) to achieve her dreams. As has been discussed by [Moffitt \(2019: 481\)](#) and [Turner \(2013: 87–8\)](#), Tiana's socio-economic status and the wider structures that contribute to it are not addressed throughout the film, with one exception. Her social demographic was highlighted when it was revealed someone had offered to pay in full for the sugar mill, and the realtors dismissed Tiana's argument for signing the papers with: 'which is why a little woman of your – background, would have had her hands full try'n'a run a big business like that. You're better off where ya at'. Even after all her hard work, Tiana was being discriminated against due to her ethnicity, gender, and class ([Mollet 2020: 115](#)). But this appeared to be the only time that Disney was attempting to acknowledge the wider discrimination and oppression Tiana had experienced while simultaneously being vague around the discrimination Tiana faced ([Gregory 2010: 443](#)). Rather, racism is hinted at in this conversation but not addressed fully ([Gregory 2010: 443](#)). It highlighted the social mobility barriers for Black women ([Moffitt 2019; Turner 2013](#)). It was highly likely that Tiana did not have time to have 'fun' when working double shifts at two jobs. Therefore, when Naveen insulted her by claiming that there was something 'wrong' with her because he deemed that she didn't know how to have fun (highlighting his privilege), Tiana stood up for herself. She held up a metaphorical mirror to Naveen's laziness, and when he continued to insult her, she explained the dichotomy of their two lives. Tiana refused to allow Naveen to belittle and insult her when she had worked so hard for her achievements, standing up for herself and her choices. [Moffitt \(2019\)](#) provides an insightful analysis of Tiana's assertiveness that overarches her representation. She argues, 'it

is in her anthropomorphism that Tiana has an ability to assert herself as a “strong Black woman” without the negative connotations associated with that familiar trope’ (481). Therefore, Tiana’s assertiveness appears more overtly as a frog, than in her human form, which Moffitt argues challenges ‘problematic representations of Black women and again opens the door for her acceptance as a viable Disney princess’ (2019: 481). It will be interesting to note whether Tiana is able to continue demonstrating her assertive nature as a human in the forthcoming 2023 Disney+ *Tiana* TV series.

Rapunzel was forced to develop an assertive nature to negotiate with Flynn Rider to see the floating lights. Mother Gothel regularly belittled Rapunzel, suggesting that she mumbled, was fragile, immature, gullible, naive, and vague, among other insults. It was clear this affected Rapunzel’s confidence, as when she tried to communicate with Flynn Rider, she was very nervous. However, as the conversation goes on, she developed her assertive nature:

Flynn Rider: Is this ... hair?
Rapunzel: [*Hidden*] Struggling ... struggling is pointless. I know why you’re here, and I’m not afraid of you.
Flynn: What?
[*Rapunzel comes into the light.*]
Rapunzel: Who are you, and how did you find me?

At first, she appeared apprehensive about speaking to Flynn Rider. This was quite understandable; she had lived alone in a tower with Mother Gothel for as long as she could remember. Flynn Rider was the first human she had ever come across. It was clear during her interrogation she was very uncomfortable and inexperienced:

Flynn Rider: Ho, oh no, where is my satchel?
Rapunzel: I hid it, somewhere you’ll never find it.
Flynn Rider: It’s in the pot, isn’t it?
[*Rapunzel knocks him out with the frying pan again, Pascal wakes him up.*]
Flynn Rider: Ah! Would you stop that?
Rapunzel: Now it’s hidden where you’ll never find it. So, what do you want with my hair? To cut it?

Rapunzel did not think about hiding the satchel in a better place and had to knock Flynn unconscious to hide it again. As she interrogated him, she realized that he was not there for her hair, so he could help her to see the floating lights. However, when they began their journey, Flynn Rider tried to intimidate her by taking her to a pub full of ruffians and

thugs, knowing it would scare her. When they arrive, the inhabitants of the pub recognized Flynn as a wanted thief and captured him to hand him over for a reward. Rapunzel realized she was losing her guide, so she attempted to rescue him:

Rapunzel: Give me back my guide!
 Flynn Rider: Not the nose, not the nose, not the nose!
[Rapunzel pulls back a branch with her hair so that it hits a ruffian to get their attention.]
 Rapunzel: Put him down! *[All of the men are wide eyed and shocked]*
 Okay, I don't know where I am, and I need him to take me to see the lanterns, because I've been dreaming about them my entire life. Find your humanity! Haven't any of you ever had a dream?

Rapunzel managed to control a room full of men who, collectively, have committed a great deal of crime. She single-handedly rescued Flynn Rider from their capture and was able to completely change the atmosphere in the room, with everyone sharing their dreams rather than trying to hurt Flynn Rider. This also led one of the ruffians to help Rapunzel and Flynn escape from the palace guards, and later help Flynn escape from his execution at the palace.

Rapunzel's assertive nature was tested when Mother Gothel found her in the forest. However, Rapunzel had developed more confidence while being away from her, and demonstrated it when Gothel tried to get Rapunzel to come home:

Mother Gothel: We're going home, Rapunzel. Now.
 Rapunzel: You ... you don't understand. I've been on this incredible journey, and I've seen and learned so much. I even met someone.
 Mother Gothel: Yes, the wanted thief. I'm so proud. Come on Rapunzel.
 Rapunzel: Mother, wait. I think, I think he likes me.
 Mother Gothel: Likes you? Please Rapunzel, that's demented.
 Rapunzel: But mother, I ...
 Mother Gothel: This is why you never should have left. Dear this whole romance that you've invented, just proves you're too naive to be here. Why would he like you *[she takes Rapunzel's face in her hand]* come on now really? Look at you! You think that he's impressed? Don't be a dummy, come with mummy. Mother –
 Rapunzel: No!

Before, Gothel was always able to manipulate Rapunzel into conforming to her wishes, however this time Rapunzel stood up to her ‘mother’ and ignored all Gothel’s attempts at belittling and abusing her. Rapunzel chose to stay with Flynn Rider to see the floating lights instead of returning with Mother Gothel. However, when Gothel tricked Flynn Rider into being captured and led Rapunzel to believe he tried to sell her for her hair to the Stabbington Brothers, Gothel was finally able to get Rapunzel back to the tower. However, Rapunzel had a flashback, finally recognizing all the pictures of suns in the kingdom as the same that she had been painting in the tower. She realized she was the lost princess that the kingdom released the floating lanterns for:

Rapunzel: *[In a low voice]* I’m the lost princess.
Mother Gothel: Please speak up, Rapunzel. You know how I hate the mumbling.
Rapunzel: I am the lost princess, aren’t I? *[Mother Gothel’s face drops]* Did I mumble, mother? Or should I even call you that?
Mother Gothel: Rapunzel, do you even hear yourself? Why would you ask such a ridiculous question?
Rapunzel: It was you! It was all you!
[Mother Gothel’s face narrows.]
Mother Gothel: Everything I did, was to protect you. *[Rapunzel pushes past her]* Rapunzel!
Rapunzel: I’ve spent my entire life hiding from people who would use me for my power.
Mother Gothel: Rapunzel!
Rapunzel: When I should have been hiding, from you!
Mother Gothel: Where will you go? He won’t be there for you.
Rapunzel: What did you do to him?
Mother Gothel: That criminal, is to be hanged for his crimes.
Rapunzel: No!
Mother Gothel: Now, now. It’s alright. Listen to me, all of this is as it should be.
[She goes to pat Rapunzel’s hair.]
Rapunzel: NO! *[Rapunzel grabs Mother Gothel’s wrist, preventing her from touching her]* You were wrong about the world. And you were wrong about me. And I will *never* let you use my hair again!

Rapunzel held Mother Gothel accountable for kidnapping her and using her for her hair. This image of assertiveness was completely different to the shy and mumbling Rapunzel from earlier in the film. It was clear Rapunzel

had learnt a lot on her journey to see the floating lanterns and would not allow herself to be used or commodified again.

Overall, fourth wave princesses continued the image of assertiveness within the princess phenomenon. They stood up for themselves when people attempted to belittle or mock them and held them accountable for their actions. Like the third wave, Tiana and Rapunzel used physical action to demonstrate their dislike of their treatment, as well as verbally standing up for themselves. This illustrated how the phenomenon continued to change throughout the waves. Despite having a determined and assertive nature, Tiana and Rapunzel ended their films desiring romantic relationships over their dreams, reminiscent of the second wave.

Desiring a romantic relationship and self-sacrifice

So far, I have discussed the determination and assertiveness of the princesses, identifying them as active dreamers. Tiana and Rapunzel knew what they wanted and they would go to great lengths to achieve their dream. These images continued to progress the fourth wave within the princess phenomenon, with Disney portraying women as independent and ambitious. [Hine et al \(2018b\)](#) put forth that while Tiana and Rapunzel ‘are still presented as married at the end of their movies, this was neither of their initial goals. Instead, both end up realizing through interacting with those male counterparts that they may be interested in a romantic involvement and subsequently fall in love’, arguing this narrative is less extreme than that of the previous princesses (12). However, I argue that in the later stages of both *The Princess and the Frog* and *Tangled*, the narrative changed for the princess protagonist ([Moffitt 2019: 472](#)). Reminiscent of the second wave, Tiana and Rapunzel were placed within a plot line that *forced* them to decide between their dream or a romantic relationship. Both chose the latter, *knowingly* sacrificing their dream in the process ([Colombo and Muir 2020: 4](#)). Although others have argued romance was not their initial goal, and ‘both end up realizing through interacting with those male counterparts that they may be interested in a romantic involvement and subsequently fell in love’ ([Hine et al 2018b: 12](#)), I argue the narrative shift in the films forces both Tiana and Rapunzel to choose between their dreams and their new found desire for romance. I have identified this as ‘sacrificing dreamers’, as each princess had a dream, but knowingly sacrificed it for a romantic relationship. Here, I discuss how the images of self-sacrifice for a romantic relationship were produced within the fourth wave.

Tiana identified and reminded the audience of her dreams and aspirations throughout the film. However, as she realized she was developing feelings for Naveen she began to doubt her choices. Her feelings were hinted at

when Naveen taught Tiana to dance, they shared a moment where they nearly kissed, but Tiana prevented it by stating, “Lottie’s getting herself one heck of a dance partner. We best be pushing on”. At this point, she was still focusing on getting her restaurant. However, after Naveen made her dinner on the boat back to New Orleans and once again promised her he would help her get the restaurant, she began to question her desires:

Tiana: [*To Evangeline the star*] Evangeline, I’ve always been so sure about what I wanted, but now I ... What do I do? Please tell me.

Tiana was clearly torn between the restaurant she had spent her life saving for, and the man she had known for a few days. Whelan (2012, 2014) argued Tiana’s goal for a restaurant never changed, ‘not when she first meets Prince Naveen, not when she realizes she loves him, and not even after she marries him’ (30, 181). However, Tiana’s vocalized thoughts on whether she knew what she wanted suggest otherwise. And after defeating the shadow man and resisting his tempting offer of giving her the restaurant through voodoo, Tiana stopped Charlotte from kissing Naveen, sacrificing her own dreams:

Charlotte: If I kiss you before midnight, you and Tiana will turn human again? And then we’re gonna get ourselves married and live happily ever after, the end!

[*Tiana hops into earshot.*]

Naveen: Yeah, more or less. But remember, you must give Tiana all the money she requires for her restaurant. Because Tiana. She is my Evangeline.

Charlotte: Anything you want, sugar. Pucker up, buttercup.

[*Naveen is very unenthusiastic about kissing her.*]

Tiana: Wait!

Naveen: Tiana?

Charlotte: Tiana?

Tiana: Don’t do this.

Naveen: I have to do this. And we are running out of time.

Tiana: I won’t let you!

Naveen: It’s the only way to get you your dream!

Tiana: My dream? My dream wouldn’t be complete without you in it. I love you Naveen.

There was an opportunity with *The Princess and the Frog* to give a princess exactly what she had worked so hard for. Yet, Tiana’s storyline was brought back to romance, and she sacrificed her dream to pursue a romantic relationship (Dundes and Streiff 2016: 1). Two additional things

must be noted here. Firstly, although having a restaurant was Tiana's dream, it was also her father's (Clapp-Itnyre 2010: 14). It seemed that Tiana (perhaps out of filial duty) wanted to fulfil her father's dream so much it had now become her own (Dundes and Streiff 2016: 7; Stover 2013: 5). She demonstrated this when she explained to her mother at the sugar mill, "I got to make sure all Daddy's hard work means something", and when she told Naveen about her dream at dinner, she explained, "We always wanted to open this restaurant. He died before he could see it happen. But tomorrow, with your help, our dream is finally coming true". Therefore, it became clear that perhaps Tiana had been self-sacrificing throughout the film, for a dream that was not entirely her own (Bradford 2012: 185; Gregory 2010: 442). A caveat to this is that although Tiana's dreams of a restaurant are shared with her father, 'Tiana's vision for her restaurant is entirely her own' (Mollet 2020: 113). Secondly, Naveen actively wanted to help fulfil Tiana's dreams, because he knew that was what she wanted and because he loved her. This was why he made sure Charlotte would pay Tiana before he agreed to marry her.³ However, Tiana seemed to decide after knowing someone for a few days that her dream of a restaurant would not be complete without Naveen. Although it had been argued that Tiana and Naveen's romance developed over a longer period and involved them actively getting to know one another better through their journey (England et al 2011: 564, 565; Mollet 2020: 112), this was still a very large sacrifice for Tiana to make. Despite Charlotte agreeing to kiss Naveen anyway so she could help her friend, it was too late. Tiana and Naveen were now stuck as frogs, which they seemed to gladly accept (Mollet 2020: 112). This brought Tiana's storyline right back to that of the second wave, as it was now focused on romance. This was further reinforced when, as frogs, Tiana and Naveen got married, which meant Tiana did become a princess, so when they kissed, they returned to their human forms (Moffitt 2019: 477). This is reminiscent of what Mama Odie suggested earlier in the film, where she was encouraging Tiana to dig a little deeper, while implying to Naveen that admitting his feelings for Tiana was what he needed to do (Moffitt 2019: 477). Others have suggested this undermines Tiana's established empowerment throughout the film, as she is only able to have the restaurant through Naveen's family's money (Bradford 2012: 185; Gregory 2010: 447; Mitchell-Smith 2012: 221). This could suggest that women can 'have it all' (Clapp-Itnyre 2010: 14; Hefner et al 2017: 528; Lester 2010: 303; Maity 2014: 31), however I would argue that by making a romantic relationship the only way for Tiana to become human again; she was being rewarded for pursuing the romantic relationship with Naveen with her restaurant, instead of her being rewarded because of all the hard work she had done.

Rapunzel also produced images of self-sacrifice in pursuit of a romantic relationship. Like Tiana, Rapunzel revealed her dream to the audience from the very beginning of the film. And she achieved it. When Flynn accompanied her to the kingdom, they took a boat to watch the floating lanterns. It was implied during the song ‘I See The Light’ that Rapunzel’s new dream could be Flynn, or perhaps her newfound freedom. However, this new opportunity was ruined when Flynn was framed and captured by palace guards, and Rapunzel was tricked into returning with Mother Gothel. Even though Rapunzel realized she was the lost princess of the kingdom, and she stood up to Mother Gothel, she was bound and gagged and set as a trap for when Flynn inevitably arrived at the tower to find her:

Flynn Rider: Rapunzel, I thought I’d never see you again.
[*He sees Rapunzel bound and gagged, she is trying to communicate with him to warn him, but it is too late. Mother Gothel fatally stabs him.*]
Mother Gothel: Now look what you’ve done Rapunzel. Oh, don’t worry dear, our secret will die with him. [*Rapunzel’s cries are muffled through her gag*] And as for us? We are going where no one will ever find you again. [*Rapunzel cries for Flynn again, she is resisting Mother Gothel*] Rapunzel, really. Enough already. Stop fighting me!
[*Rapunzel manages to get her gag off.*]
Rapunzel: No! I won’t stop. For every minute of the rest of my life I will fight. I will never stop trying to get away from you. But, if you let me save him, I will go with you.
Flynn Rider: [*Moaning in pain*] No! No, Rapunzel!
Rapunzel: I’ll never run; I’ll never try to escape. Just let me heal him. And you and I will be together. Forever, just like you want. Everything will be the way it was; I promise. Just like you want. Just let me heal him.

Rapunzel gave up any hope of freedom she had to save Flynn Rider’s life. Although she had only known him for a short time, she had bonded with him, developed feelings for him, and had just watched him be stabbed. Nevertheless, Rapunzel was sacrificing her freedom to save Flynn Rider (Reilly 2016: 57). She was essentially placing his life above her own freedom. Flynn Rider was deeply unhappy with the situation:

Flynn Rider: I can’t let you do this.
Rapunzel: And I can’t let you die.
Flynn Rider: But if you do this –
Rapunzel: Shhh.

Flynn Rider: Then you ... will die.
 Rapunzel: Hey, it's gonna be alright.
 Flynn Rider: Rapunzel, wait ... [*He reaches up as though he is about to kiss her, but instead cuts her hair with a shard of smashed mirror*]

Perhaps Rapunzel planned on healing Flynn, and then they could have defeated Mother Gothel between them, or perhaps she was convincing herself and Flynn that this was the best solution. Nevertheless, although Rapunzel made this decision autonomously, Flynn decided to take control by cutting Rapunzel's hair, arguably a self-sacrifice of his own (Hine et al 2018b: 11; Mollet 2020: 122). This act saved Rapunzel from Mother Gothel, as it caused her to age at an alarming rate. She was horrified by her reflection, tripped over Rapunzel's hair (with help from Pascal) and evaporated. Rapunzel was now free, thanks to Flynn Rider (Seybold 2021: 73).

There were three issues to examine. Firstly, Rapunzel's choice to give Flynn Rider's life more importance than her own. This was very problematic, as Rapunzel was prioritizing the romantic feelings she had developed over two days over her now-realized false life and identity thanks to Mother Gothel. She willingly gave up her autonomy so that she could heal Flynn Rider, rather than just trying to defeat Mother Gothel. Flynn Rider even tried to stop her from healing him because he knew that she was essentially sentencing herself to death by doing so. This led to the second issue. Although Rapunzel had arguably made a poor choice, it was still her own. When Flynn took that choice away by cutting her hair, he was the one that was 'saving' her, which was reminiscent of first and second wave princesses being rescued. Although Rapunzel was freed by this action, she was being freed by a man, rather than achieving it on her own. Finally, Rapunzel sacrificed her next dream to save Flynn Rider. It was confirmed that a romantic relationship with Flynn was Rapunzel's new dream, as she admitted this to him before he died in her arms. Of course, as her dream *was* Flynn Rider, this did make sense. However, this would lead Rapunzel to become a damsel in distress. If she had been able to heal Flynn, and then leave with Mother Gothel, it would have then been Flynn's sole mission to escape his chains and the tower and go after Rapunzel, who was now unable to escape her captor. The only way Rapunzel would then be able to achieve her new dream of a romantic relationship, was if Flynn Rider rescued her. This reduced Rapunzel's new ambitions to a romantic relationship and would lead her to becoming a victim in need of rescuing, reminiscent of the first wave. Therefore, Rapunzel's self-sacrifice in the name of a romantic relationship was rooted in similar images of first and second wave princesses.

Tiana and Rapunzel had problematic storylines that led them to sacrifice their own dreams and freedom for the men they loved. Like the second

wave, Tiana's dreams were lost within her pursuit of a relationship, and Rapunzel sacrificed her freedom to rescue the man she loved. This image of self-sacrifice caused the fourth wave princesses to be categorized as 'sacrificing dreamers', as their dreams were sacrificed due to their new desire for their love interest. Of course, both Tiana and Rapunzel were rewarded for this by being granted their romantic relationship, as well as their other dreams (Garlen and Sandlin 2017: 963). However, both princesses were reduced to relying on being rewarded with their dream due to forming romantic relationships.

Conclusion

The fourth wave were classed as 'sacrificing dreamers'. Each princess had a specific dream and used their assertive nature and determination to try and achieve it, but knowingly sacrificed their dream for a romantic relationship. Tiana gave up her human body and her dream of opening a restaurant so she could be with Naveen. Rapunzel gave up her freedom to save Flynn Rider's life. Both women were rewarded for their sacrifice with their newly desired romantic relationship, *and* their original dream. However, the women had to sacrifice it to achieve it. 'Sacrificing dreamers' suggested that the princess' changed their priorities after a love interest arrived, and actively made a choice to sacrifice their dream for their male love interest, rather than just to 'forget' it, like second wave princesses.

The fourth wave princesses did revert to some more traditional images of the first and second wave. Although the fourth wave featured images of assertiveness and determination, their self-sacrifice at the end of the film, owing to their desire for a romantic relationship, was difficult to ignore. Tiana and Rapunzel were both assertive, standing up for themselves when belittled (Tiana) and manipulated (Rapunzel) by men (and in Rapunzel's case, women as well). They also developed a new characteristic, determination. Third wave princesses did not have any specific or obvious desires; however, fourth wave princesses had a clear goal *and* a plan to achieve it. This determination was featured within the plotlines until the very end, where the narrative forced the princess to shift her goal by choosing between a love interest and her own dream. Although romance was an afterthought within the third wave films, it eclipsed the fourth wave princesses' desires. Tiana knowingly gave up her childhood dream of a restaurant to be with Naveen, and Rapunzel consciously gave up her freedom to save Flynn Rider's life. This narrative shift was reminiscent of the second wave's behaviour policing. The fourth wave continued to transgress away from the first wave with their determination and assertiveness, and then a romantic love interest was introduced. This punished the heroines, as they now had to make the choice between their original and new desires. Unlike the third wave, Tiana and Rapunzel sacrificed

their dreams to pursue a romantic relationship (once again, they could not have both). However, because they did choose the relationship, both Tiana and Rapunzel were rewarded for their self-sacrifice with a relationship *and* their original dream. However, this was only because they had chosen the relationship *first*, rather than second. This was a plot line reminiscent of the second wave. This posed the question that if third wave princesses had chosen their relationship, would they have also been granted leadership?

The assertiveness and determination of the fourth wave remained a cultural mirror to American society for women. Women were breaking down barriers and accessing new areas of society. Women served in the Afghanistan and Iraq Wars and America had its first female four-star general. Hillary Clinton was the first woman to win the first presidential primary, however lost the presidential nomination to Barack Obama. It seemed that America was still not quite ready for a woman leader. The fourth wave seemed to mirror this, with neither Tiana or Rapunzel acting as or being in a leadership position. In fact, the fourth wave became self-sacrificing to pursue a romantic relationship. Even though in American society women's representation within the public sphere was continually rising, the fourth wave princesses fell short of producing another wave of strong leadership.

‘Innovative Leaders’: A Progressive Era of Princesses

Brave (2012) was released two years after *Tangled*, and no significant cultural changes had happened during the interim. However, as *Frozen* was released in 2013, *Moana* in 2016, and *Frozen II* in 2019, several events and ‘firsts’ had occurred. Within legislation and the workplace there were changes, but also setbacks. In 2012, The Paycheck Fairness Act that would have reduced gender discrimination in the workplace failed in the Senate after Republicans blocked the bill (Bendery 2012). In 2013, the US military began allowing women to serve in combat roles (Harris 2013). The Violence Against Women Act (2013) was also renewed, providing further protection for Native American women and members of the LGBTQ+ community (Human Rights Watch 2013). In 2015, the Supreme Court legalized same-sex marriage and the recognition of out of state same-sex marriages through *Obergefell v Hodges*. Within society several changes were taking place as well. In 2016, Hillary Clinton was the first woman to run for president for a major political party, however despite receiving more votes (but fewer states), she lost to Donald Trump after an incredibly misogynistic campaign (Jamieson 2017). Despite this, 53 per cent of white female voters helped Trump to get to the White House (Jaffe 2018: 19). Although Sarah Jaffe commented exit polls do not usually separate voters by more than one or two demographics, she identified five general categories ‘of Trump-voting women: the wealthy, the white supremacist, the evangelical, the security voter, and the worker’ (2018: 19). She noted Trump was able to gain 58.2 per cent of white women over 65 (Jaffe 2018: 20). Despite being a woman, Clinton was unable to gain the votes of the more traditional, older woman. Trump’s win caused outrage across the world, with women organizing demonstrations, now known as the Women’s March, to protest the election of Donald Trump who had been publicly presenting himself as discriminatory before, during, and after the election (Freedland 2016; La Ganga and Jacobs 2016; Tamkin and Gramer 2017). The march was

also highlighting a need for more legislation and policies on minority rights (Women's March n.d.). Trump went on to appoint Nikki Haley as the United States Ambassador to the United Nations in January 2017, but she resigned in late 2018 (Haberman et al 2018). Trump appointed Elaine Chao as Secretary of Transportation in 2017, but she later resigned in January 2021, 'citing the troubling nature of President Donald Trump's rally Wednesday and the chaos it later spurred as rioters tore through the halls of the Capitol building' (Snyder 2021 n.d.).

In 2017, the 'Me Too' movement resurfaced due to Hollywood Director Harvey Weinstein being accused of sexual abuse. Women celebrities began sharing their 'Me Too' moment of experiencing sexual harassment, and it soon trickled down to the public, with women sharing stories all over the world (Slawson 2017).¹ In 2017, there was a record number of women representatives in Congress, demonstrating a shift in women's representation in US politics (Desilver 2018). Overall, this was a time of advance, but also of contestation when it came to women's rights. Despite Hillary Clinton making history as the first woman to run for president from a major political party, her campaign was met with hostility and misogyny. Although women's rights took steps forward, America ultimately chose a man who was recorded bragging 'he could grab women's genitals' (La Ganga and Jacobs 2016). Therefore, the fifth wave princesses, like the waves before them, can be read from a postfeminist lens, especially when discussing the notion of 'having it all'. This book will be focusing on the images of femininity within the princess phenomenon, but it is important to acknowledge these films were created within a postfeminist market. It would seem America was still not ready to let women have it all.² Despite this, Disney were producing heroines who could.

Brave was released in 2012, grossing \$538,983,207, ranked thirteenth overall (Box Office Mojo n.d.m). Meanwhile, the Walt Disney Company acquired UTV Software Communications, allowing them to reach more Asian markets, and announced their plans to purchase Lucasfilm Ltd in October 2012 (D23 n.d.), giving them the film rights to the Star Wars Franchise. In 2013, Disney's *Frozen* premiered and became the highest-grossing animated film, earning \$1,280,802,282 (Box Office Mojo n.d.n). It was the number one grossing film of 2013. While its release was a success, it did come 'under particular scrutiny for its all-White cast of characters' (Macaluso 2016: 79), which was later addressed in *Frozen II*. A year later, Disney purchased Maker Studios (Spangler 2014) and developed it into the Disney Digital Network in 2017 (Spangler 2017a). In 2016, after promoting Tom Staggs to chief operations officer (COO) a year prior, the company and Staggs parted ways (Garrahan 2016). Later that year, Disney purchased a 33 per cent stake in streaming media provider BAMTech, hoping to create an ESPN streaming service (Miller 2016).

In 2016, Disney released *Moana* grossing at \$643,331,111 and ranked twelfth for box office releases that year (Box Office Mojo n.d.o), and was subject to criticism for its portrayal of Polynesian culture (Anjirbag 2018: 6; Banh 2020). It was Disney's first princess of colour for a while, with *Tangled* (2010), *Brave* (2012), and *Frozen* (2013) all featuring white princesses. This furthers Anjirbag's (2018) argument from the third wave chapter that *Moana* is part of the "seasoning" on the hegemonic status quo' (3). Disney formed the Oceanic Story Trust, 'a group of anthropologists, cultural practitioners, historians, linguists, and choreographers from islands including Samoa, Tahiti, Mo'orea, and Fiji' (Robinson 2016: n.p.). However, the formation and operation of the trust came under criticism (Anjirbag 2018: 6), especially when conducting close readings of *Moana* and its embedded coloniality.³ In 2017, Disney increased its stake in BAMTech to 75 per cent. They announced their plan to launch a subscription streaming service of their films (now known as Disney+) (Spangler 2017b). A month after the 'Me Too' movement against sexual harassment and abuse resurfaced, animator, executive producer, director, screenwriter, and chief creative officer of Walt Disney Animation Studios, Pixar, and Disneytoons Studios John Lasseter took a six month leave of absence from his roles for behavioural misconduct. Many alluded to Lasseter's supposed sexual misconduct directed towards employees (Masters 2017). In 2018, Lasseter left his role (Barnes 2018), implying the idea that even a company considered as wholesome as Disney was impacted by the patriarchal nature of Hollywood. Disney's most recent activity has been the acquisition of 21st Century Fox in March 2019 (The Walt Disney Company 2019), and the release of their own streaming service, Disney+ in November 2019 (Lee 2019). In 2019, Disney released the much-anticipated sequel, *Frozen II* which grossed third overall at \$1,450,026,933 (Box Office Mojo n.d.p).

Fifth wave characteristics

Merida was depicted as an archer, a leader, adventurous, had a lack of communication, assertive, quick thinking, actively dealt with a situation, provided and received female support, was a communicator, and a warrior. She was seen by other characters as an archer, needing to be lady-like, warrior, brave, someone to marry, and in need of protection. In *Frozen*, Anna was portrayed as adventurous, the opposite of grace, desires freedom, lonely, desires a romantic relationship, awkward, clumsy, isolated, protective, a leader, assertive, quick thinking, negotiator, rescuer, fearless, provides (and receives) female support, lack of communication, brave, not interested in appearance, determined, self-sacrificing, and having a respectful relationship. She was seen by other characters as isolated, beautiful, in need of protection, in need of help, should be desiring a romantic relationship, someone to marry,

and a political tool. On the other hand, Elsa was depicted as adventurous, powerful, having uncontrolled power, graceful, regal, poised, protective, practical, having controlled power, and assertive. Other characters perceived her as powerful, isolated, beautiful, having freedom, embracing her magic, being fearful of uncontrollable powers, having a lack of communication, someone to marry, and a political tool. In *Frozen II*, both princesses received further character development. Anna was depicted as desiring a romantic relationship, curious, giving and receiving female support, assertive, quick thinking, leadership, resilient, brave, and having a supportive romantic relationship. Others saw her as someone to marry, in need of protection, and a leader. Elsa, who did not receive as much development in the first film, centred more in the narrative of *Frozen II*, and was portrayed as not desiring a romantic relationship, curious, a leader, giving and receiving female support, powerful, quick thinking, determined, brave, and self-accepting. Others saw her as in need of protection and a leader. Finally, Moana was depicted as adventurous, curious, chosen by the ocean, rebellious, a leader, having a different way of thinking, determined, exploring her identity, giving and receiving female support, assertive, quick thinking, negotiator, eager to learn, the chosen one, brave, supportive, communicator, and a rescuer. Other characters saw her as a leader, rebellious, giving and receiving female support, a princess, brave, and the chosen one.

I identified 59 characteristics across the four princesses. I noted that particularly in this wave, more characteristics were introduced, demonstrating a more complex development of the Disney Princesses since the beginning of the phenomenon. There were four key images of femininity shared by the four princesses: an assertive nature, leadership, female support, and lack of romantic relationships.⁴ The introduction of female support and a lack of romantic relationships distinguished them from their predecessors, as the storylines focused more heavily on the complexity of the characters and their journeys within the films.

Assertive

Like their predecessors, fifth wave princesses demonstrated assertiveness throughout their films (Hine et al 2018b: 10). Merida demonstrated this quality when she rejected the family tradition of her marrying to unite the clans. Anna was able to achieve her goals through her assertive nature in both *Frozen* and *Frozen II*. Although Elsa did not show signs of assertiveness in *Frozen* (although Whitfield (2017: 231) argued ‘Let it Go’ can be framed as self-assertion), her character developed the trait significantly through her leadership in *Frozen II* when she was the Queen of Arendelle. Finally, Moana displayed this characteristic during her communication with Maui, the demi-god.

Merida was constructed as the opposite of the traditional archetypes produced by Walt Disney Studios. Meanwhile, her mother, Queen Elinor reminded her that a princess must eat nicely, rise early, be compassionate, patient, cautious, clean, 'and, above all, a princess strives for, well, perfection!', Merida was the opposite (Koppy 2021: 128). She enjoyed mucking out her horse Angus, climbing, and most importantly, archery (Itmeizeh and Ma'ayeh 2017: 34). Of all the princesses created by Disney, Merida appeared to be the most 'unprincesslike' within the phenomenon (Koppy 2021: 129). It was almost a demonstration that Disney 'no longer expects its viewers to buy into traditional femininity ... Merida does not have to be submissive and silent because she is a princess – and a girl' (Whelan 2014: 185). Like princesses before her, she demonstrated an assertive nature when she was told she was to be betrothed:

- Elinor: The lords are presenting their sons as suitors for your betrothal!
- Merida: [*She is mortified*] What?
- Elinor: The clans have accepted!
- Merida: Dad!
- Fergus: [*He doesn't know where to put himself*] What? I ... You ... She ... Elinor?
- Elinor: Honestly Merida. I don't know why you are reacting in this way. This year, each clan will present a suitor to compete in the games for your hand.
- Merida: I suppose a princess just does what she's told!
- Elinor: A princess does not raise her voice! Merida, this is what you've been preparing for your whole life.
- Merida: No! It's what you've been preparing me for my whole life! I won't go through with it! You can't make me!

Unlike Aurora, a first wave princess, who was unhappy with being betrothed to someone she hadn't met, but did nothing about it; and Jasmine, a second wave princess who was unhappy with marriage until the right man came along; and even Pocahontas, a third wave princess, who politely rejected her father's wishes for her to marry Kocoum, Merida rejected the entire notion outright (Itmeizeh and Ma'ayeh 2017: 34). Not only did her outburst question the tradition of arranged marriages and parental authority, but she was questioning 'princesshood' itself. By questioning "I suppose a princess just does what she's told" and rejecting her mother's claims that this was what she had been preparing for her whole life, Merida demonstrated new bounds of assertiveness through the questioning of the actual patriarchal structure she found herself in. Although Elinor 'upholds the stability of the system by excelling at all the aspects of the feminine ... Merida, in contrast,

excels at the activities normally coded masculine ... she resents the more traditionally feminine activities and norms of behavior Elinor tries to impart' (Koppy 2021: 128). So much so, she decided to take matters completely into her own hands (Whitfield 2017: 226). She explained to her horse, "I swear Angus, this isn't going to happen! Not if I have any say in it". She realized she could choose the 'challenge' for her suitors, all of whom must be the first born of their clan. She chose archery, and when the time came, she presented herself as a contender. After the three contenders had shot their arrows, a hooded figure with the Dun Broch flag revealed themselves to be Merida: "I am Merida, firstborn descendant of clan Dun Broch. And I'll be shooting for my own hand!". Merida was not only taking her fate into her own hands, but she was challenging the patriarchal structures upheld by her society (Koppy 2021: 132). Her refusal to marry, and her plan to fight for her own hand displayed signs of assertiveness that had not been seen within the princess phenomenon.

Although *Frozen* and *Frozen II* focused more on leadership and female support, Anna did show assertiveness in her communications with men (Macaluso 2016: 81; Steinhoff 2017: 169). In *Frozen*, when she needed a guide to take her to the North Mountain to find her sister, Elsa, she came across Kristoff.

Anna: I want you to take me up the North Mountain.
 Kristoff: I don't take people places. [*He lays back down on the hay and closes his eyes*]
 Anna: Let me rephrase that. [*She throws the supplies he tried to buy in the shop in his lap*]
 Kristoff: Umph. [*He takes a look in the bag*]
 Anna: Take me up the North Mountain. Please. [*He looks at her, unimpressed*] Look, I know how to stop this winter.
 [*Kristoff lies back down with his hat over his eyes so he can go back to sleep.*]
 Kristoff: We leave at dawn ... And you forgot the carrots for Sven.
 [*A bag of carrots lands in Kristoff's face*] Ugh!
 Anna: Oops. Sorry. Sorry. I'm sorry. I didn't – [*she catches herself*]
 We leave now. Right now.

Although Anna's nervous disposition suggested she was not used to being assertive (she did grow up in an isolated household), she still had no issue with making demands to save Arendelle from Elsa's ice powers. She clearly thought her negotiation plan through, purchased what Kristoff couldn't afford, and used it as a bargaining tool in exchange for his guidance. She even had the sense to hold one element back so when Kristoff tried to decide when they would leave, Anna still had something she could use to get her own way. It became clearer she may not necessarily be used to being

assertive when she firstly apologized to Kristoff for hitting him with the carrots, before correcting herself to get what she came for.

Anna was another princess who was seen committing an act of violence. When her supposed beloved Prince Hans revealed himself to be after the Arendelle throne, he left Anna to freeze to death and as the newly appointed King sentenced Elsa to death for treason, as she was the reason Anna began to freeze. However, he revealed his plan to Anna before locking her in a room. So, when Anna used her last moments before she froze to save Elsa, and Elsa was able to return Arendelle to its former non-frozen state, Anna reprimanded Hans:

[Hans gets back onto his feet after the ice has been lifted, Kristoff goes to reprimand him, but Anna stops him with her arm.]

Anna: Ah, ah, ah, ah.

Hans: Anna? But she froze your heart.

Anna: The only frozen heart around here is yours. *[She turns away, pauses, and then turns around and punches him in the face so hard he falls off the ship]*

Although Kristoff attempted to deal with Hans, it was Anna that physically held him back as she wanted to reprimand him herself (Hackett 2020: 218). Anna's confidence in her own ability demonstrated her assertive behaviour, and her method of dealing with Hans was one of the few purposeful acts of violence completed by a princess. Like Kida and Tiana, Anna reprimanded men who behaved inappropriately or wrongly towards her. She did not make allowances for Hans when she had seen his true intentions, and between Anna and Elsa, they had him returned to the Southern Isles to ensure he could not continue trying to access the throne.

Moana demonstrated assertiveness in her interactions with Maui, the demi-god she took to return the heart of Te Fiti (Hine et al 2018a: 2). When she finally reached the island where Maui had been shipwrecked, she practised what she would say to the legendary man she had heard of since childhood:

Moana: Maui, demi-god of the wind and sea. I am Moana of Motunui. You will board my boat. No. *[With a more commanding tone]* You will board my boat. Yeah.

However, when the time came, Maui who is known in Polynesian legend as a trickster, tried to distract her:

Moana: Maui. Shapeshifter. Demi-god of the wind and sea. I am Moana –

Maui: Hero of man.

Moana: W-what?
 Maui: It's actually Maui, shapeshifter, demi-god of the wind and sea, hero of man. I interrupted, from the top. Hero of man. Go.
 Moana: [*Starting again*] I am Mo –
 Maui: Sorry, sorry, sorry, sorry. And women. Men and women. Both. All. Not a guy, girl thing. Ah, you know, Maui is a hero to all. You're doing great.

Maui continued to try and distract Moana from her task; however, she used her assertive nature to get Maui to listen to her. As he was trying to dazzle her by signing her oar, she took it from him, hit him in the stomach, and took him by the ear:

Moana: You are not my hero, and I'm not here so you can sign my oar! I'm here because you stole the heart of Te Fiti. And you will board my boat, [*she tries to pull him, but he is too heavy*] sail across the sea and put it back!

Although she was initially distracted by Maui, she maintained her confidence and gave him his commands. Like Anna, Tiana, and Kida, Moana was also seen committing an act of violence when a man was disrespecting her. However, Maui was persistent, and crafts an entire song to distract Moana enough to trap her in a cave so he could steal her boat. She managed to get out and repeat herself again, not taking no for an answer. Moana did not allow Maui to try and trick her again, she persuaded him to help her with negotiation. Although the fifth wave showed signs of assertiveness, it was not the defining characteristic of the wave. Their assertiveness did contribute to the development of leadership skills.

Leader

The fifth wave returned to an image of leadership within the phenomenon. Like Pocahontas, Mulan, and Kida, the fifth wave each demonstrated leadership, with some quite literally being leaders of their people. As with the third wave, I defined leadership as the ability to guide or direct others.

Merida was one of the only princesses who was seen being prepared for leadership. Significantly, she was prepared by her mother rather than her father, who was the official leader of all the clans. This suggested Elinor felt Merida needed leadership training and had a larger input into the running of the clans. Merida's princess lessons were seen at the beginning of the film, and although she indicated her contempt for them, she was being taught the history of the kingdom, public speaking, and was given duties

and responsibilities (although they are not made clear). All these activities would help to shape her into a leader, and they were all being taught by her mother. It was heavily implied that, while Fergus was the King of the clans, it was Elinor who wore the crown. She was the one who commanded the attention of the unruly clans, who did the public speaking, and arranged for the clans to come. This was a transitional change for Disney Princess films, as mothers were either dead (Snow White; Cinderella; Ariel; Belle; Jasmine; Pocahontas; Kida) or played a very small role in the film (Aurora; Mulan; Tiana; Rapunzel). Stepmothers on the other hand were the films' antagonists (Snow White; Cinderella; Aurora; Rapunzel). In *Brave*, Elinor appeared to be both, a strong leader, but her conflict with Merida also placed her as the film's antagonist to begin with. Katie Kapurch suggested that Elinor was attempting to mould Merida 'into the kind of princess Disney defined with Snow White and Cinderella' (2016: 49). However, I argue Elinor was doing her best to help Merida be a leader within the structure in which they found themselves, and it was through that training Merida was eventually able to change her fate. The Queen seemed to think the way things were done could not be changed because of tradition, but Merida's fiery and assertive nature in combination with her training allowed her to rebel against the patriarchal norms. Elinor's husband, Fergus was presented as the comic relief within *Brave*, rather than as the overbearing father (as in *The Little Mermaid*). This was made clearer when Fergus had to address the clans, and had no idea what to say:

- Fergus: So, here we are. [Pause] Uh ... The four clans. [Pause] Uh ... Gathering. [Elinor puts her head in her hands] For ... uh ... [He looks very unsure]
- Elinor: [Rises from her throne] The presentation of the suitors.
- Fergus: [Once he gets an idea of what Elinor is saying] The presentation of the suitors.

Not only did Elinor seem to be the true support and leader of the clan, always looking at the bigger picture, she was passing this knowledge on to Merida. Although this was juxtaposed with Elinor wanting Merida to get married, Elinor practiced explaining to Merida that "I understand this must all seem unfair, even I had reservations when I faced betrothal. But we can't just run away from who we are!". Here, she may have been referring to their royal status, and their need to continue lineage to avoid another war. By uniting two clans, their clan lineage was secure, and their clan grew larger.

However, Merida proved to her mother she didn't need to be married to lead the clan towards the end of the film. As Merida and Elinor's relationship grew, Merida understood the importance of her role as a princess. When trying to sneak Elinor in her bear form back to the castle, Merida had

to pacify the restless clan leaders who were demanding answers on the impending betrothal. Merida explained their clans were bonded within their kingdom, and reminded them how despite their differences, the clans came together to defend the kingdom when it was under attack. She called on the clan leaders and reminded them how they all supported each other. Merida used her history lessons to rally the clans together again and used her public speaking to command a room full of hundreds of men. Despite her dislike of being prepared to be a princess, she was now able to use the tools to resolve the conflict she caused between the clans. Like Pocahontas of the third wave, Merida used her communication skills to resolve the issue, which was previously being solved through violence and war by the clansmen. Elinor looked on proudly at Merida, realizing her lessons had resonated with her and she was reaching her potential as a leader. Elinor then realized Merida didn't need to get married (Kapurch 2016: 56):

Merida: And so, there is the matter of my betrothal. I've decided to do what's right. [*Elinor gets Merida's attention*] And ... and ... and ... [*Elinor signs a breaking motion*] break ... tradition. [*Elinor nods and continues to sign to Merida*] My mother ... the Queen, feels ... in her heart, that I ... that we be free to ... write our own story. Follow ... our ... hearts. And find love in our own time.

Through Elinor and her blessing, Merida was able to change the narrative and the traditions of her society. This allowed her to change her fate, and in the future potentially become a leader in her own right, rather than need to marry someone (Seybold 2021: 73). The fact it was Elinor who gave the blessing, rather than Fergus (the actual leader of the kingdom) implied how it was women who were truly leading, and how Elinor knew Merida was capable to do so with or without a man.

Frozen did not provide Anna and Elsa with many opportunities to display their leadership skills, as the story focused more on female support. Despite this, Anna did show signs of a developing leadership when she decided to go and find Elsa after she froze Arendelle and ran away. She told her newly betrothed, Hans, "Elsa's not dangerous. I'll bring her back, and I'll make this right" and left him in charge while she was away. Although Anna took responsibility for solving the issues Arendelle faced, which demonstrated signs of her taking on a leadership role, she also left Hans, a man who she had known for a few hours, in charge of the kingdom. Her displays of leadership continued in *Frozen II*, where Elsa was Queen and they had to work together to restore Arendelle after the elements of nature disrupted the land and forced citizens to evacuate. Although not the official leader, Anna demonstrated her leadership abilities throughout the film. Elsa on the

other hand, quite literally led Arendelle and was recognized as their queen. Elsa and Anna's leadership intertwined within *Frozen II* so I will discuss them together.

Elsa was often depicted conducting 'Queenly' duties, such as meeting with citizens and dignitaries, however, her leadership developed further when she accidentally awakened the elemental spirits of the Enchanted Forest, putting Arendelle at risk. The spirits caused Arendelle to become a dark, windy, damaged, and dangerous place, Elsa immediately evacuated the affected areas to keep her people safe. This showed Elsa's dedication and experience in leadership she had developed since *Frozen*. She continued by deciding she would journey to the Enchanted Forest to find out about the voice she was hearing and to save Arendelle from further destruction. Elsa was the second princess who was in an official leadership role as Queen, and it was clear she took the role seriously. Along with her sister Anna, Kristoff, Olaf, and Sven, Elsa made the long journey to discover the voice only she could hear to help them locate the Enchanted Forest.

When they arrived, they met the Northuldra and Arendellian troops who were trapped in the Enchanted Forest after the entrance was sealed. After realizing Elsa is now Queen, the Arendellian guards rallied around the sisters to demonstrate their loyalty, scaring the Northuldran people. Seeing this, Elsa assertively intervened to bring peace to the two opposing sides:

Elsa: Wait. Please! Someone has called me here. If I can just find them ... I believe they have the answers that may help us free this forest. Trust me. I just want to help.

Although the Northuldra were sceptical, Elsa proved her intentions when a fire spirit set the forest alight. Elsa quickly stepped into action, using her powers to save people and stop the forest from burning. Elsa promised the Northuldra and the troops she would free the forest and restore Arendelle to its former state. Anna was concerned with such a promise, telling her sibling, "That's a pretty big promise Elsa". This highlighted both women's leadership styles. Elsa, who was born with powers, was confident in her own abilities. Anna preferred to manage expectations, explaining to another Northuldran, Honeymaren, "We'll do all we can".

Although Anna accompanied Elsa for most of the journey through the Enchanted Forest, Elsa deliberately separated them to protect Anna from the rest of the journey. When they found the ship their parents left Arendelle in, and discovered they died trying to reach Ahtohallan (a river that holds the secrets of the past), Elsa (to Anna's protest) refused to allow Anna to accompany her to keep her safe. However, when Elsa reached Ahtohallan it was revealed her powers were gifted to her because of her mother selflessly saving their father as children. Elsa discovered *she* was the fifth elemental

spirit, alongside earth, water, wind, and fire. Elsa was able to see more memories, and eventually found her grandfather explaining the dam he offered to the Northuldran people was a plot to colonize their land. She watched him kill the Northuldran leader after he questioned the effects of the dam, which caused the war between the two groups. However, Elsa had ventured too far within Ahtohallan, and began to freeze. Using her powers, Elsa sent the memory to Anna before she turned to ice. This was a strong representation of leadership, Elsa sacrificed herself to pass the knowledge on to Anna, knowing Anna would be able to protect Arendelle. Although Elsa's leadership focused more on her use of powers, Anna's appeared to be more pragmatic, something Elsa was aware of, demonstrating Elsa's belief in Anna's abilities as a leader.

Receiving Elsa's memory, Anna realized what had happened and how it needed to be rectified. However, Olaf began to fade due to the loss of Elsa's powers, and he explained Elsa wasn't fine, and she would have to go on without him. Assuming her sister was dead, Anna grieved for Elsa and Olaf, who had disintegrated. However, Anna knew she must continue to save Arendelle, which she sang in the song 'The Next Right Thing': "You are lost, hope is gone, but you must go on, and do the next right thing". Anna managed to escape the cave she was trapped in and saw the enormous sleeping earth giants. She attempted to wake them up so she could make them chase her to the dam, screaming "Come and get me! Come on!". Anna's aim was for the giants to damage the dam, which would cause an evacuated Arendelle to flood. She hoped this would be an offering to break the mist and free the forest, and restore peace between Arendelle, the Northuldra and the spirits (Putri and Retnaningdyah 2021: 138–9).⁵ Together with Elsa, she rejects and redresses 'the sins of the past in order to save the present and protect the future' (Davis 2022: 657). The earth giants pursued Anna, and ultimately began to catch her. However, an unaware Kristoff was looking for Anna and Elsa in the woods and found her running from the giants. As she was about to be crushed, Kristoff was able to pull her to safety. His interaction with her indicated he saw Anna as a leader. He asked, "I'm here, what do you need?", and when Anna explained she needed to get to the dam, he followed her instructions. Rather than taking charge himself, Kristoff left the plan and leadership to Anna, demonstrating his belief in her leadership.

When they arrived, the Arendellian soldiers were trying to stop Anna from destroying the dam due to their orders all those years ago. However, Anna persuaded them to follow her instructions, which eventually led to the giants destroying the dam. With the water gushing towards Arendelle, Anna's actions resulted in Elsa being unfrozen, so she was able to rush to save Arendelle from being engulfed in water with her ice powers. Although they worked separately, both Anna and Elsa's actions contributed to saving Arendelle and freeing the Enchanted Forest.

When the sisters were reunited, Elsa revealed to Anna she was the fifth spirit, the one who would act as a bridge between magic and people:

- Elsa: And Anna, Arendelle did not fall.
Anna: It didn't?
Elsa: The spirits all agreed. Arendelle deserves to stand, with you.
Anna: Me?
Elsa: You did what was right. For everyone.
Anna: Did you find the fifth spirit? [*Elsa looks at her*] You are the fifth spirit! You're the bridge!
Elsa: Well actually a bridge has two sides. And mother had two daughters. We did this together. And we'll continue to do this together.
Anna: [*They place their foreheads together*] Together.

The combination of both Elsa and Anna's leadership styles working together demonstrated their united strength. This led to a new start for both. Honeymaren explained to Elsa she belonged in the Enchanted Forest, rather than in Arendelle. As Queen, Elsa noted she made a promise to 'do what's best for Arendelle', however she knew 'just what that is', while looking at Anna. The final scenes of the film implied Anna had become Queen of Arendelle, while Elsa remained in the Enchanted Forest as a leader. Anna was seen at her coronation, and Elsa was seen in the Enchanted Forest. Although she was not wearing a crown, she was dressed completely differently (and regally) to the Northuldran people. Anna's note Elsa received continued to imply Elsa's leadership, telling Elsa to "keep looking after the forest". Both sisters ended the film as leaders of their people (Davis 2022: 661).

Moana was the daughter of the Chief of Motunui, and it was widely known she would take his place. She was told by her father as a child she was the 'next great chief' of her people, and her mother told her she would do wondrous things. Moana's image as a leader to her family and people was emphasized greatly at the beginning of the film: her father reminded her of her responsibilities, took her to the sacred place of chiefs, and told her one day she would place a stone on the highest part of the island to raise it higher under her leadership. He again reminded her she was the future of her people. Although Moana accepted this to an extent, she was also drawn by the ocean, which she was trying to ignore during the song 'Where You Are':

- Moana: I'll lead the way,
I'll have my people to guide me,
We'll build our future together, where we are.

Moana was the one of the few princess films to truly recognize the princess as a leader. Like Kida and Elsa, Moana would inherit the leadership from her father, however Moana's father ensured she took an active role. He encouraged her to follow him, make suggestions, and help their people. Before she embarked on her quest, Moana was seen to be fixing her people's problems such as leaking roofs and harvest issues. The people of Motunui saw Moana as a leader, whispering to the chief "she's doing great!". Moana's ease at leadership and problem solving was recognized by her father, who told her 'this suits you'. Unlike her predecessors, Moana was supported by her father and given responsibilities to keep the island running. Although the third wave and members of the fifth wave (Merida, and Anna and Elsa in *Frozen*) demonstrated leadership, Moana was the first princess to be depicted as actively participating in leadership of her land.

Moana also seemed to demonstrate a different style of leadership to her father. As a child, she was drawn to the ocean, but Chief Tui would not allow anyone past the reef for fear of their safety. However, when it was brought to their attention the fishermen were catching less fish (which unbeknownst to them, was because Te Fiti's heart had been stolen and the world around them was decaying, like the legend said), Moana had an idea. Although she first suggested rotating the fishing grounds and fishing on different sides of the island, she learnt the fisherman had exhausted all their options. So, she suggested they fish beyond the reef. Her father immediately rejected it, reminding her they had 'one rule'. Moana persisted, arguing it was an 'old rule, when there were fish'. Here, her father saw her as rebellious, wanting an excuse to go back to the water she so desperately craved. However, Moana was making an informed, sensible choice. If there was no fish near their island, they would need to venture out further to get food. This was not a case of wanting to be close to the ocean, Moana saw this as a matter of survival, and wanted the best for her people. Although Chief Tui saw this as rebellion, I argue this was a case of Moana thinking and leading in a more efficient way.

After Moana restored the heart of Te Fiti, she was able to return to Motunui. The film ended with Moana being celebrated as a leader. She had placed a seashell on the stones of the sacred place of chiefs, indicating her taking on an official leadership role, but in her own way. The scene shifted to Moana leading her people to voyage for new lands as they did before. She helped her father to direct the boat, her mother to tie the ropes, and felt the water in order to check they were heading in the right direction. After seeing her Gramma in her manta ray spirit form, and Maui in the sky, Moana took her place at the front of the boat, watching the horizon in front of her, and leading her people to a new land. Although [Streich and Dundes \(2017b\)](#) argued it was Chief Tui at the helm of the boat and in control (7), I argue the scene clearly depicted Moana leading and delegating, with her at the front. This was a powerful image for the film to end on, implying

Moana's bravery and determination when saving her island had developed her leadership even further.

Female support

The fifth wave introduced a new image, female support. In previous waves, the princesses had often been one of the few women characters within the film and were often pitted up against any other women (Snow White, Cinderella, Aurora, Ariel, and Rapunzel particularly) (Heatwole 2016: 6; Lester 2019: 193; Muir 2022b: 138–41; Steinhoff 2017: 166). In later films, supporting characters were introduced such as Nakoma and Grandmother Willow in *Pocahontas*, *Mulan's* women family members, and Tiana's best friend Charlotte and her mother Eudora in *The Princess and the Frog*. However, these characters either had a minor role, or did not contribute to a princess' character development (except for Grandmother Willow). The fifth wave films placed more emphasis on women's relationships (Heatwole 2016: 6), and how they shaped the narrative and development of the princesses. In *Brave*, this was demonstrated through the strained relations between Merida and her mother Elinor; *Frozen* and *Frozen II* highlighted a difficult and complex connection between sisters Anna and Elsa; and *Moana* developed women's familial support and the bond between heroine and villain.

Brave began with a flashback of Merida's childhood, where we saw her playing with her mother, Elinor. Although she disapproved of Merida's requests for weaponry, they still had a loving relationship. However, in the present scenes, with Elinor constantly training Merida to become a princess highlighting their stark differences, it was clear there was a strain on their relationship. One of the main causes of this was their breakdown in communication, which was highlighted through Elinor's conversation with her husband Fergus, and Merida's conversation with her horse, Angus. Although Merida had tried to explain to Elinor she wanted no part in an arranged marriage, Elinor (bound by her duty as queen) dismissed her daughter's concerns. However, neither would tell the other how they truly felt about the situation.

Elinor informed her husband she didn't know what to do about Merida's unwillingness, and when Fergus told her to speak to her daughter again, she retorted, "I do speak to her! She just doesn't listen!". However, Elinor did not realize that she was not speaking *to* her daughter, rather she was speaking *at* her. The scene then flowed from Elinor's conversation with Fergus to Merida's monologue with Angus, where they were finally able to speak their minds, but the other could not hear:

Elinor: Merida. All this work, all the time spent preparing you, schooling you, giving you everything we never had ... I ask you, what do you expect us to do?

- Merida: Call off the gathering! Would that kill them? You're the Queen, you can just tell the lords, the princess is not ready for this. In fact, she might not ever be ready for this so that's that. Good day to you. We'll expect your declarations of war in the morning.
- Elinor: I understand this must all seem unfair, even I had reservations when I faced betrothal. But we can't just run away from who we are!
- Merida: I don't want my life to be over. I want my freedom!
- Elinor: But are you willing to pay the price your freedom will cost?
- Merida: I'm not doing any of this to hurt you.
- Elinor: If you could just try to see what I do, I do out of love.
- Merida: But it's my life, it's ... I'm just not ready.
- Elinor: I think you'd see, if you could just ...
- Merida: I think I could make you understand if you would just ...
- Elinor: ... listen!
- Merida: ... listen!

Finally, the two women shared their true thoughts, but not with each other. So far, Elinor had been quite strict with Merida, and here the audience was able to see why. As Queen herself, she knew the responsibilities Merida would inherit and was trying to prepare her in the best way she could (also implying she never received such support herself). Merida finally revealed she simply wasn't ready for marriage and saw betrothal as though her life would be over. Although Merida desired freedom, Elinor posed the question of whether Merida was willing to pay the price her freedom would cost, something she had not said to Merida in person. It became clear the breakdown in communication between the two women had led the other to believe they were against each other, when in fact they just wanted the other to see their point of view. Elinor wanted the best for Merida and believed training her to become a leader would help her. However, she was training her and asking her to marry within a traditional male framework which only benefitted men. All of Elinor's teachings were based on what men needed to know to lead their clan. Merida on the other hand, wanted leadership on her own terms, including not getting married.

When the women saw each other on the day of the clan gathering, it was clear they were still unable to communicate properly with one another. Merida was wearing a very tight dress, with a cap covering her long, unruly hair. She was clearly very uncomfortable, and when Elinor exclaimed how beautiful Merida looked, she tried to tell her mother how she felt, saying "I can't breathe!". Elinor did not listen, replying "Oh, shush. Give us a turn". Merida tried again, "I can't move, it's too tight!" and Elinor once again ignored her daughter, telling her, "It's perfect". However, they both took

a moment, staring at each other, Merida seeing her mother so happy, and Elinor seeing her daughter so uncomfortable. It seemed they would finally say what they were thinking to one another. However, the moment passed, and Elinor simply reminded her daughter to smile. It was clear now that Elinor and Merida's communication had completely broken down. Elinor was allowing herself to be bound by tradition and legend, whereas Merida wanted to forge her own path without considering the consequences.

When Merida decided to compete for her own hand, shocking her family and the clans, it was the final straw for her relationship with Elinor. Dragging her back inside, Elinor chastised Merida for her recklessness:

Elinor: You don't know what you've done!
 Merida: I don't care ...
 Elinor: There'll be fire and swords if it's not set right.
 Merida: [*Exasperated*] Just listen!
 Elinor: I am the Queen! You listen to me!
 Merida: Oh, this is so unfair!
 Elinor: Unfair?
 Merida: You're never there for me. This whole marriage is what you want! Do you ever bother to ask what I want? No! You walk around telling me what to do, what not to do, trying to make me be like you. Well, I'm not going to be like you!
 Elinor: Oh, you're acting like a child.
 Merida: And you're a beast! That's what you are! [*She points her sword at sewing of Elinor on the tapestry*]
 Elinor: Merida!
 Merida: I'll never be like you! [*She points the sword further into the tapestry*]
 Elinor: No, stop that!
 Merida: I'd rather die than be like you! [*She rips the tapestry with the sword, separating the sewn Merida and Elinor*]
 Elinor: Merida, you are a princess, I expect you to act like one! [*Elinor throws Merida's sword down, takes her beloved bow and throws it into the fire. Merida is heartbroken, and leaves the room*]
 Elinor: Merida! Merida! [*She tries to get the bow out of the fire, but it is too late*] Oh, dear! Oh, no. What have I done?

Even a blazing row, where Merida finally revealed her true feelings, did not prompt Elinor to try and communicate with her daughter properly. Instead, she became more authoritarian, and destroyed something precious to Merida, her bow. The lack of communication and understanding between the two women is what led to Merida taking drastic action by asking for

a spell to change her fate, which accidentally turned her mother into a bear (Heatwole 2016: 7).

This narrative, driven by Merida, is what allowed them to develop their relationship and support one another. It was revealed they had two days to 'mend the bond torn by pride', otherwise Elinor would remain a bear forever. Elinor was unable to speak to Merida, so they were forced to listen and communicate with each other to reverse the spell (Koppy 2021: 133–4). They supported each other in various ways throughout the rest of the film (Koppy 2021: 134). Firstly, Merida helped Elinor adapt to life as a bear. Secondly, both women worked together to protect one another from Mor'du, another bear. And thirdly, Merida protected her mother from the clansmen who believed Elinor was the bear that killed human Elinor.

To support her mother, Merida helped her to adapt to her larger body and new skill set. Although Elinor tried to gather breakfast normally, she accidentally selected poisonous berries in the forest. Merida used the opportunity to teach her how to catch salmon for a proper meal. They also tried to follow the wisps; in the hope it would lead them to more answers. It brought them to an abandoned castle, where they realized the vicious bear Mor'du (who attacked the family at the beginning of the film) was the prince from the legend Elinor often repeated to Merida, the spell had happened before. Mor'du launched an attack on Merida, and she defended herself with her bow. Her weapons were not enough to defeat him, and Elinor tried to pull her out of the room. Mor'du came after them, but Elinor was able to use her new strength as a bear to push boulders towards him, trapping him. They realized they must return to the tapestry and fix it to reverse the spell.

Once they arrived at the castle, they tried to sneak in unnoticed, with Merida distracting the clansmen by claiming she had spoken to Elinor. Merida spoke confidently and assertively to the room full of men, with her mother looking on proudly. And, although Merida was willing to go through with her marriage, Elinor signalled to Merida she wished her to break tradition and be free to write her own story. This signified the growth of both women, and their relationship. Both were willing to support the other's wishes, with Elinor especially realizing her mistakes and giving Merida the freedom to forge her own path.

However, this happy moment was short-lived, as the clansmen realized there was a bear in the castle, and Fergus mistook Elinor's destroyed room (from when she transformed) and her absence for her death at the hands of a bear. Although Merida tried to tell her father what happened, he would not listen and went off to avenge his wife, locking Merida in her room. There was not much time left before the second sunset, when the spell became irreversible. Merida mended the ripped tapestry, managed to get

out of the castle with her brothers' help and chased after her father to stop him. She arrived just as Fergus was about to unknowingly kill Elinor and disarmed him, shouting "Get back, that's my mother!". He pushed her away and the clansmen held her back, but Merida broke free, took a clansmen's sword, and blocked her father again. She actively fought him, and hit his wooden leg with her sword, causing him to fall over. She told him again, "I'll not let you kill my mother". A new issue arrived with the entrance of Mor'du, and the clansmen attacked him. Mor'du easily beat them and aimed for Merida who was defending herself. He pinned her down, and Elinor broke free from her containment to protect her daughter. She fought with Mor'du, pushing him against one of the large boulders. He managed to break free, and Merida protected both herself and Elinor with a spear, but the boulder crashed down on Mor'du, killing him, and releasing the prince's spirit. Merida and Elinor's fierce protection of one another demonstrated their developed bond.

As the time to reverse the spell drew nearer, Merida draped the tapestry over Elinor, but nothing happened. Elinor's once brown eyes turned to black, and Merida realized it had not worked:

Merida: Oh, no. I don't understand, I ... [*She begins crying*] Oh, mum! I'm sorry. This is all my fault! I did this to you! To us! [*She hugs the bear*] You've always been there for me. You've never given up on me. I just want you back! [*The bear looks on, blankly, at the melancholy clansmen*] I want you back, mummy! I love you.

[*The sun rises, and Merida holds the bear, sobbing. However, a human arm then strokes her head and Merida looks up to see her mother in human form.*]

Mum, you're back! [*Elinor laughs and kisses her daughter*]
You changed!

Elinor: Oh, darling. We both have.

Elinor and Merida working together, supporting one another mended their bond, and had changed not only their relationship, but also themselves. The film ended with them making a new tapestry together (of Merida and Elinor as a bear), waving off the clansmen, and riding their horses together, being watched by a wisp. The development of Elinor and Merida's relationship went from a complete lack of communication and understanding, to one of protection and female support. Merida righted her wrongs and supported her mother, and Elinor supported her daughter's wish for freedom.

Frozen developed another complex and strained relationship, this time between two sisters. Close in childhood, Elsa and Anna ended up leading separate lives when Elsa accidentally hit Anna with an ice blast while playing.

Their parents agreed it was easier to isolate Elsa until she was able to control her powers, however they continued to get worse. To protect Anna, her memories of Elsa's powers were erased, and the sisters became estranged. When their parents were lost at sea, and Elsa inherited the crown, they were finally reunited at her coronation celebrations, but Anna's desperation for love and affection with her new love interest Prince Hans was thwarted by Elsa, who banned her marrying a man she'd just met to protect her sister⁶ and stopped the party. Accidentally revealing her powers, Elsa ran away from Arendelle, not realizing she had frozen the entire area. In a bid to save the kingdom and her sister, Anna embarked on a quest to find her.

Although she had been separated from Elsa for as long as she could remember, Anna was desperate to rebuild their relationship. And when Elsa left Arendelle after freezing it, Anna immediately went to find her. When she did, Elsa's protective support and Anna's belief in Elsa was immediately shown (Llompart and Brugué 2019: 107):

Anna: I'm so sorry about what happened. If I'd known –
 Elsa: [*Retreats away from her sister*] No, no, it's okay. You don't have to apologize ... But you should probably go, please.
 Anna: But I just got here.
 Elsa: You belong down in Arendelle.
 Anna: So do you. [*She moves towards Elsa, who continues to move back*]
 Elsa: No, Anna. I belong here. Alone. Where I can be who I am without hurting anybody.

Elsa's support was rooted in protection because of her fear of her own powers and the potential they could hurt people. She had hurt Anna once (which Anna couldn't remember), and she did not want to do it again. Therefore, she constantly rejected Anna to protect her from her powers (Davis 2022: 653, 658). Even though Anna had travelled a long way to find her sister, Elsa was terrified of something happening again, so she tried to force her to leave. Anna, on the other hand, tried to encourage Elsa by affirming she belonged in Arendelle with her. Elsa continued to reject Anna, even when she tried to persuade her they could be close again, like they were as children, especially as it caused Elsa to recall how she hurt Anna:

Elsa: No, we can't. [*She begins climbing her staircase*] Goodbye Anna.
 Anna: Elsa, wait –
 Elsa: No, I'm just trying to protect you.
 Anna: [*Continues to chase Elsa*] You don't have to protect me. I'm not afraid. Please don't shut me out again,
 Please don't slam the door

You don't have to keep your distance anymore
'Cause for the first time in forever
I finally understand
For the first time in forever
We can fix this hand in hand
We can head down this mountain together
You don't have to live in fear
'Cause for the first time in forever,
I will be right here.

Anna demonstrated her belief in Elsa, and her desire to fix things together. Anna was offering her support by way of teamwork and affirmations. However, Elsa was still too worried about hurting her own sister and wanted to protect her:

Anna: You've kind of set off an eternal winter ... everywhere
Elsa: Everywhere?
Anna: It's okay, you can just unfreeze it
Elsa: No, I can't, I – I don't know how!
Anna: Sure you can! I know you can!
'Cause for the first time in forever,
Elsa: Oh, I'm such a fool, I can't be free!
Anna: You don't have to be afraid
Elsa: No escape from the storm inside of me!
Anna: We can work this out together
Elsa: I can't control the curse!
Anna: We'll reverse the storm you've made
Elsa: Ohhhh, Anna, please, you'll only make it worse!
Anna: Don't panic
Elsa: There's so much fear!
Anna: We'll make the sun shine bright
Elsa: You're not safe here!
Anna: We can face this thing together
Elsa: Oh!
Anna: We can change this winter weather
Elsa: AHHHHH ...
Anna: And everything will be alright ...
Elsa: I CAN'T!

Again, Anna was affirming her belief in Elsa, telling her that together they could fix the winter in Arendelle. However, Elsa became so distressed that in her bid to protect Anna she accidentally lashed out, hitting Anna's heart with ice. It was clear that due to their isolation from one another, the sisters

were completely out of sync. Although both were trying to support and protect the other, the combination of both attempts resulted in Anna getting injured again (Whitfield 2017: 225). However, when Anna sacrificed herself to save Elsa from Hans and turned to ice, Elsa realized the consequences of their isolation. Anna's final moments were dedicated to supporting and protecting her sister, an act of true love. Love and Anna's support is what helped Elsa to see how she could control her magic. If love thawed, then Elsa accepting herself as she is, with Anna's help, was how to control her powers. For Mollet (2020) this representation of female support 'created an unprecedented opportunity for the Disney fairy tale to transform its representation of women in a deeply significant way' (124), which continued with *Frozen II*.

In *Frozen II*, when the sister's bond has been mended, they still displayed different forms of female support. Again, Anna's support for Elsa was centred on her strong belief in Elsa's abilities. Elsa on the other hand was fearful Anna would be hurt, so her support is centred on protection.

When Elsa realized she was hearing a voice that no one else could, she chose to keep it to herself. She became distracted while playing charades with Anna, Kristoff, Sven, and Olaf and excused herself. For Elsa, this was her own way of protecting Anna, she did not want her to worry. However, Anna realized there was something wrong:

- Elsa: I just don't wanna mess things up.
 Anna: What things? You're doing great! Oh Elsa, when are you going to see yourself the way I see you?
 Elsa: What would I do without you?
 Anna: You'll always have me.

As demonstrated here, Anna based her support around her love and belief in Elsa. In her eyes, Elsa could do anything she set her mind to, which followed on from her belief in *Frozen*. On the other hand, although Elsa was not lying to Anna, she was not telling her the truth about the voice she could hear, demonstrating that Elsa was still trying to protect her sister. This contrast continued as Elsa tried to do things on her own without help and Anna used her support to step in and guide Elsa away from her solitary ways. Anna told Elsa she was upset that she wasn't told about the voices Elsa was hearing. However, Anna suggested that she trusts Elsa's judgement that the voice was not evil and demanded to accompany her on the journey. Although Elsa offered her support in the form of protection again by trying to stop Anna from coming with her, Anna knew she would be able to help Elsa. Although she had no powers of her own, Anna asked Elsa to promise her they would complete their quest together. This also showed Anna's emphasis on teamwork, she wanted

them to work together to save Arendelle, she did not want the burden to fall to just one of them.

Elsa on the other hand, struggled with Anna's way of supporting her, preferring to do things alone so she could protect Anna with her powers. When the forest caught fire, Elsa began to use her powers to deal with the fire herself. Anna, concerned for her sister's safety tried to call to her:

Anna: Elsa! Get out of there! [*Elsa continues putting out the flames, but more arise*] No. No. No. [*Anna begins running towards her sister*] Elsa!

[*After Kristoff returns from rescuing lost reindeer, he sees Anna collapsing due to smoke inhalation.*]

Kristoff: Anna!

[*Hearing this, Elsa turns, and already exhausted uses her powers to get rid of the fire around Anna, Kristoff is able to grab her.*]

Elsa: [*Weakly*] Get her out of here!

Anna: [*She is being held by Kristoff on Sven*] No! Elsa! [*She reaches out for her sister as she moves further away*]

In this scene, Elsa saw Anna as someone in need of protection because she had entered the flames to try and help. Elsa's way of trying to support Anna was by protecting her and removing her from the situation entirely. Both sisters were trying to support the other, but while they were not clashing personally, their forms of support were. Anna reminded her sister she was not being careful after they reunited:

Anna: Are you okay?

Elsa: What were you doing? You could've been killed. You can't just follow me into fire!

Anna: [*Angry*] You don't want me to follow you into fire, then don't run into fire! [*Concerned*] You're not being careful Elsa.

Elsa tried to protect her sister with her powers, however despite Anna's belief in Elsa, she also wanted to protect her by helping. Like *Frozen*, Anna and Elsa's forms of support clash again, with them both trying to protect the other.

When Elsa decided to leave the Northuldra to continue to search for the voice, Anna went with her. She did not know where Kristoff was, but left without him, putting Elsa first. As the sisters and Olaf continued their search for the voice, they found their parents' abandoned ship. Upon learning they died trying to find the source of Elsa's powers, Elsa felt responsible. Anna once again provided Elsa with support, explaining, "You are not responsible for their choices Elsa". Although her sister disagreed, Anna reminded her that she was a gift:

Anna: If anyone can resolve the past ... If anyone can save Arendelle and free this forest, it's you! I believe in you Elsa, more than anyone or anything.

Anna's strong belief in Elsa helped her to continue in the quest. But Elsa wanted to go on alone, she was concerned it was too dangerous for them both to go to Ahtohallan:

Elsa: Not we. Me.

Anna: What?

Elsa: The dark sea is too dangerous for us both.

Anna: No. No! We do this together. Remember the song? 'Go too far and you'll be drowned'. Who will stop you from going too far?

Elsa: You said you believed in me, that this is what I was born to do.

Anna: And I don't wanna stop you from that. I ... I don't wanna stop you from being whatever you need to be. I just don't want you dying ... trying to be everything for everyone else too. Don't do this alone. Let me help you, please. I can't lose you Elsa.

Again, this was Elsa's way of supporting Anna by protecting her. However, Anna was worried Elsa would go too far, as she proved when trying to tackle the forest fire. The sister's images of female support clashed again, as Elsa made the decision for her, claiming "I can't lose you either Anna" and sent her sister and Olaf away in an ice boat against their wishes to protect them. This turned out to be the most sensible decision in the end, as it allowed Elsa to discover how Arendelle had betrayed the Northuldran people and communicate it to Anna through her powers, Anna was then able to interpret Elsa's message and right the wrong that had been committed by their grandfather. Although Elsa and Anna worked separately, it ultimately allowed them to work *together* to save Arendelle. It also enabled Elsa to visit Ahtohallan and discover the origin and true destiny of her powers, a trip Anna may not have survived as someone without ice powers and therefore not as resistant to the cold. The complex portrayal of Anna and Elsa's female support demonstrated the different ways women can and should support one another, often being able to find the most appropriate solution separately and together.

The sisters were not reunited until the end of the film, after Anna had destroyed the dam, and Elsa had protected Arendelle from going underwater. Anna was overwhelmed at the sight of her sister whom she thought was dead, exclaiming "I thought I'd lost you!". Elsa disagreed, telling her, "lost

me? You saved me, again”, referencing Anna’s act of true love in *Frozen* also saved Elsa from being killed (Davis 2022: 664). Elsa summarized their support to Anna, saying, “We did this together. And we’ll continue to do this together”, signifying the events of *Frozen II* had truly solidified how both their interpretations of female support had entwined and complimented the other.

Moana featured three relationships between women, and their impact on Moana’s journey. While Moana’s relationship with Maui is described as supporting ‘patriarchal norms’ by Seybold (2021: 77), I argue the female support demonstrated in the film empowers Moana to continue her own journey, whether Maui is present or not. Rather than being strained, such as the relationship between Merida and Elinor or Anna and Elsa, Moana’s relationships helped her to complete her quest to save her island. Moana’s relationship with Gramma Tala was the most developed. Her grandmother saw Moana’s connection with water and watched her being chosen to restore the heart. Although the young Moana had to return to her father, Gramma Tala retrieved the heart Moana left behind and kept it safe until the time was right. It was Gramma Tala who showed Moana the past of her people and inspired her to find Maui and return the heart. Even though she became gravely ill, Gramma Tala urged Moana to leave to save the island.

Gramma Tala:	[<i>She takes Moana’s hand and weakly mumbles</i>] Go.
Moana:	Gramma?
Gramma Tala:	Go.
Moana:	[<i>Crying</i>] Not now. I can’t.
Gramma Tala:	You must. The ocean chose you. Follow the fishhook.
Moana:	Gramma –
Gramma Tala:	And when you find Maui, you grab him by the ear. You say “I am Moana of Motunui. You will board my boat, [<i>she takes off her necklace</i>] sail across the sea, [<i>she places the necklace and heart in Moana’s hand</i>] and restore the heart of Te Fiti”.

Although Moana was hesitant, her grandmother reminded her “there is nowhere you could go, that I won’t be with you”. Gramma Tala’s belief in Moana encouraged her to leave, even during a difficult time. She knew her granddaughter would be able to solve the issues the island had. Her encouragement of Moana gave her the confidence to command Maui, as well as restore the heart herself.

As Moana packed her things to leave, she was discovered by her mother, Sina. Although Chief Tui would be against Moana leaving, the non-verbal scene depicted Sina helping her daughter and hugging her goodbye

(Streiff and Dundes 2017b: 6). Although a short visual, the female support demonstrated by the women in Moana's life encouraged her (Colombo and Muir 2020: 11). And even when it was implied Gramma Tala had passed away, her manta ray spirit guided Moana beyond the reef. These interactions with her women family members reassured Moana she was not alone, and she was supported throughout her journey.

Gramma Tala appeared again towards the end of the film, where Moana's first attempt at returning the heart failed and Maui abandoned her to protect his damaged fishhook. Defeated, Moana returned the heart to the ocean, explaining she wasn't the right person and they had to choose someone else. Gramma Tala appeared to support Moana, explaining "I never should have put so much on your shoulders. If you are ready to go home, I will be with you". This in turn also took the pressure off Moana. Gramma did not force her to continue, she acknowledged she asked too much of her and empowered her to make her own choice. However, Moana hesitated in her Gramma's presence. Her grandmother used this as an opportunity to encourage Moana one more time:

Moana: I know a girl from an island
 She stands apart from the crowd
 She loves the sea and her people
 She makes her whole family proud
 Sometimes the world seems against you
 The journey may leave a scar
 But scars can heal and reveal just
 Where you are
 The people you love will change you
 The things you have learned will guide you
 And nothing on earth can silence
 The quiet voice still inside you
 And when that voice starts to whisper
 Moana, you've come so far
 Moana, listen
 Do you know who you are?

Gramma Tala encouraged Moana to believe in herself, that she could love both the ocean and her role as a leader. In fact, the combination of the two would allow Moana to complete her quest if she accepted herself. Gramma Tala was using the song to ask Moana to think about who she was:

Moana: Who am I?
 I am a girl who loves my island
 I'm the girl who loves the sea

It calls me
 I am the daughter of the village chief
 We are descended from voyagers
 Who found their way across the world
 They call me
 I've delivered us to where we are
 I have journeyed farther
 I am everything I've learned and more
 Still it calls me
 And the call isn't out there at all, it's inside me
 It's like the tide; always falling and rising
 I will carry you here in my heart you'll remind me
 That come what may
 I know the way
 I am Moana!

Moana not only accepted her identity but acknowledged her success (Colombo and Muir 2020: 9–10). She realized if it wasn't for her, herself and Maui would not have achieved what they had at this point. She embraced her intuitive leadership, knowing the call for the ocean was the call for her own identity, and she knew what to do next. With that, she jumped into the ocean, retrieved the heart of Te Fiti, and decided to restore it herself, affirming "I am Moana of Motunui, aboard my boat I will sail across the sea and restore the heart of Te Fiti". This change in language indicated Moana's self-acceptance of identity, and the belief in herself that had been instilled thanks to Gramma Tala's support.

Because of the female support Moana received, it allowed her to offer it to the villain of the film, Te Kā. After Maui stole the heart of Te Fiti, a new monster was born who wanted the heart for themselves. A lava monster, Te Kā guarded the barrier islands that allowed the access to Te Fiti and would stop at nothing to retrieve the heart. Moana managed to trick Te Kā so she could get past the barrier islands, and when Maui returned to help, Moana was able to try and restore the heart. However, she discovered the island of Te Fiti was gone. When she turned to Te Kā, she noticed the spiral on her chest was identical to the heart of Te Fiti and realized that as Te Fiti was abused, Te Kā took her place. She knew that to restore the heart, she must return it to Te Kā. Moana held up the heart, causing Te Kā to stop attacking Maui. She asked the ocean to allow Te Kā to reach her, Te Kā began crawling towards Moana and she began walking to meet the lava monster. Moana sang:

Moana: I have crossed the horizon to find you
 (*Ou loto mamaina toa*)

I know your name
 (*Manatu atu*)
 They have stolen the heart from inside you
 (*Taku pelepele*)
 But this does not define you
 (*Manatunatu*)
 This is not who you are
 You know who you are.

Like her Gramma and mother, Moana provided support and love to Te Kā, rather than conflict. She reminded Te Kā that although her heart had been stolen, it did not change who she truly was. Although Te Kā looked as though she was going to attack Moana, the princess stood defiantly on a rock unphased by the smoke and fire and simply sang “This is not who you are, you know who you are”. Te Kā visibly softened her gaze and body language, her lava extinguishing from sight. Moana stepped forward and placed her forehead against Te Kā’s and whispered “who you truly are” before restoring the heart. With this, Te Kā’s lava began to fall from her body, revealing Te Fiti. Moana had learnt from the support given by Gramma Tala to embrace who she truly was and had passed this onto Te Kā to save Te Fiti. Although this scene had also been interpreted as a moment of bravery, but not particularly thought out ([Streiff and Dundes 2017b: 8](#)), I argue Moana used understanding and communication to support Te Kā, rather than fight her. This not only demonstrated how secondary characters provided Moana with support, but how Moana learnt from these instances and applied it to her own situations to help and support others.

Lack of romantic relationships

Although previous waves featured the desire for romantic relationships with men to great and small extents, the fifth wave films sometimes completely removed romance from the plotlines. *Brave*’s Merida rejected an arranged marriage, *Frozen*’s Anna focused her desires on Prince Hans, a man she had just met, before forming a relationship with Kristoff. Elsa had no mention of a desire for a romantic relationship, and it was not even a part of her character development. In *Frozen II*, Anna’s relationship with Kristoff highlighted a healthy partnership developing over time, while Elsa’s narrative still had no mention of romance. Following in Elsa’s footsteps, *Moana* had no mention of a romantic plot, the film focusing entirely on Moana’s quest. The lack of romance within fifth wave films was an interesting image, especially in comparison to the previous waves where romance with men would often become central to the princess’

story and was often the biggest feature in the princess' 'happily ever after'. In this section I will discuss how the lack of romance in fifth wave films is depicted.

Marriage was once again featured in a princess film, but unlike her predecessors Merida entirely rejected the concept of marriage and romantic relationships, stating she wanted her freedom and wasn't ready for marriage and may never be (Heatwole 2016: 7). This was a very different representation of a princess' feelings on relationships in comparison to previous waves. Although her mother insisted she went through with it, Merida decided to take matters into her own hands and enter herself in the 'competition' for her own betrothal, explaining to a shocked crowd she would be fighting for her own hand. Although she won, her mother was furious and the two argued. Still not giving up, Merida ran away from her home and stumbled across a witch disguised as a wood carver who gave her a spell to change her fate. Realizing this was the only way for her to avoid the marriage, she gave it to her mother (which turned her into a bear). The fact Merida went to great lengths to not get married implied her unwillingness to have a relationship. Although the rest of the film was centred around Merida fixing her relationship with her mother, the film showed both Merida and Elinor's character growth when Elinor finally listened to her daughter and encouraged her to tell the rest of the clans that she and her suitors should be able to find love in their own time. Merida was the first Disney Princess to end her film without a relationship at all, and the first to have never had one in the first place (Kapurch 2016: 57; Whelan 2014: 185). Merida's complete disinterest and disdain for romance demonstrated how the fifth wave of princesses were changing the narrative on desiring romantic relationships.

This image was continued in *Frozen* and *Frozen II*. Elsa also showed no interest in pursuing or having a romantic relationship in both films (Davis 2022: 667–8; Lester 2019: 209; Reilly 2016: 60), focusing instead on accepting herself, controlling her powers, looking after her kingdom, or building her relationship with Anna (Davis 2022: 667–8; Llompарт and Brugué 2019; Steinhoff 2017: 167; Whitfield 2017: 224). This implied there was more to a princess than just romantic relationships, although others have criticized this representation as a suggestion that women cannot 'have it all' in the sense that being (magically) powerful *and* having a relationship were mutually exclusive (Streiff and Dundes 2017a: 1). There have also been queer (Llompарт and Brugué 2019; Steinhoff 2017), disability (Resene 2017), superhero (Benhamou 2014a), and postfeminist (Macaluso 2016; Rudloff 2016; Seybold 2021; Steinhoff 2017; Streiff and Dundes 2017a) readings of Elsa. Anna on the other hand, did desire a romantic relationship. However, in this case Anna's desires were rooted within her longing for companionship due to her separation from Elsa. In *Frozen*, Anna noted in 'For the First Time in Forever' that now the gates were opening for Elsa's

coronation, she wouldn't be alone, and this day was a chance to change her lonely world:

Anna: Don't know if I'm elated or gassy
But I'm somewhere in that zone
'Cause for the first time in forever
I won't be alone.

I can't wait to meet everyone! [*gasp*]
What if I meet ... the one?

Tonight, imagine me gown and all
Fetchingly draped against the wall
The picture of sophisticated grace
I suddenly see him standing there
A beautiful stranger, tall and fair
I wanna stuff some chocolate in my face.

But then we laugh and talk all evening,
Which is totally bizarre
Nothing like the life I've led so far.

For the first time in forever
There'll be magic, there'll be fun
For the first time in forever
I could be noticed by someone.

Anna's desire for a romantic relationship was made clear in this song, however it was also implied her motivation for this was due to years spent in isolation (Davis 2022: 651–3). Although Maja Rudloff (2016) contemplated whether Anna should have desired travelling the world rather than a relationship (35), I argue it was understandable the lonely princess wanted some form of companionship (Davis 2022: 652). Anna was projecting her loneliness onto the desire of a relationship, rather than trying to fix the complex one with Elsa. Her desire was clearer still, when Anna bumped into Prince Hans of the Southern Isles and immediately became infatuated, accepting a marriage proposal after knowing him for only a few hours, parodying similar moments from previous princess films (Davis 2022: 650; Steinhoff 2017: 165). Mollet (2020) argues the representation of Anna and Hans' 'relationship' through the song 'Love is an Open Door' is certainly 'tongue-in-cheek, mocking their "mental synchronisation" after knowing each other only a few hours – implicating the robotic way in which early Disney princesses fawned over their princes' (128). This mocking of Anna's infatuation is immediately

challenged by Elsa, which in turn challenges the whole notion of Disney Princesses meeting and then falling in love with their prince.

When Anna and Hans broke the news to Elsa, the new Queen rejected the idea, telling Anna, “You can’t marry a man you just met”. Anna angrily retorted, “You can if it’s true love”. For the first time in a Disney Princess film, the issue of heroines falling in love with men they had known for less than a day (and then marrying them) was laid bare. *Frozen* directly challenged its predecessors and set Elsa as the first princess to question the validity of such a relationship (Davis 2014: 51). Anna on the other hand, while trying to support the concept of true love, was highlighting how a person can make rash choices when they were in a dark place (such as isolation). Elsa pointed this out, asking Anna, “what do you know about true love?”, trying to suggest her younger sister was making a poor choice. However, this backfired when Anna challenged Elsa, stating, “more than you, all you know is how to shut people out”. This visibly hurt Elsa, as although she had isolated herself from Anna, she had done it out of love and protection (Davis 2022: 658). This was the first time in the film where it was hinted that ‘true love’ was not necessarily always ‘romantic’. In fact, Hackett (2020) makes the crucial point that ‘*Frozen* asks the eternal question, “what is love?” and provides a spectrum of answers in return, from self-love to sisterly love to romantic love’ (218). In this sense, by portraying representations of different types of love, *Frozen* challenged the previous representation in Disney Princess films, but also wider Disney animation.

Anna persisted with her relationship with Hans, however Elsa was not the only one to challenge it. When Anna left Hans in charge to go and find Elsa, she instructed Kristoff to help her get to the North Mountain to find Elsa. She explained her situation to him:

- Anna: Oh well, it was all my fault. I got engaged but then she freaked out because I’d only just met him, you know, that day. And she said she wouldn’t bless the marriage –
- Kristoff: Wait. You got engaged to someone you just met that day?
- Anna: Yeah. Anyway, I got mad and so she got mad and then she tried to walk away, and I grabbed her glove –
- Kristoff: Hang on. You mean to tell me you got engaged to someone you just met?!

Kristoff was visibly shocked at Anna’s recklessness, while Anna seemed to think there was no issue:

- Anna: Hans is not a stranger.
- Kristoff: Oh yeah? What’s his last name?
- Anna: Of the Southern Isles.
- Kristoff: What’s his favourite food?

Anna: Sandwiches.
 Kristoff: Best friend's name?
 Anna: Probably John.
 Kristoff: Eye colour.
 Anna: Dreamy.
 Kristoff: Foot size?
 Anna: Foot size doesn't matter.

Anna's answers demonstrated she knew very little about her betrothed and highlighted how quickly she had entered a relationship. Kristoff's (and Elsa's) reaction was a stark contrast to the normalization of romantic relationships developing over short periods in previous films, and this conversation highlighted that contrast (Mollet 2020: 128).

The deconstruction of true love continued within the film. When Kristoff took Anna to see his troll family, they tried to persuade them to get married. However, Anna fell ill due to being struck by Elsa's ice powers, and the trolls informed Anna "only an act of true love can thaw a frozen heart". Although some trolls tried to suggest Kristoff should give Anna true love's kiss, Anna was insistent they returned to Hans. This scene embedded the idea that romantic love would save Anna. And, based on how princesses such as Snow White and Aurora had been saved, *Frozen* was simply following suit. However, the focus on the romantic narrative shifted as it was revealed Prince Hans was using Anna to become King. Although Kristoff was able to return Anna to the castle, Hans rejected Anna's request for true love's kiss. He kept Anna isolated, extinguished the fire in the room and explained he wanted to marry into the throne to become king as he was the youngest of his brothers. Although he would have preferred Elsa, he could tell 'no one was getting anywhere with her' but Anna was 'so desperate for love' she was instantly willing to marry him. He planned on killing Elsa and taking the throne for himself. However, after Elsa ran away and Anna was now dying, he could leave his betrothed, kill Elsa and become King.

The consequences of Anna's naivety and desperation for love were severe, yet the film still seemed to focus on romantic love. When Olaf found Anna, he implied Kristoff may love her, and they agreed they would find him so he could give Anna true love's kiss. However, in the climax of the film where Elsa had escaped and her emotions were causing a snowstorm, Hans was trying to find her to kill her and Anna and Kristoff were trying to find each other to save her from freezing, the theme of romantic love saving princesses ceased. Upon hearing Hans draw his sword, Anna saw him attempt to kill an unaware Elsa. Although Kristoff was close, Anna used all her strength before she fully froze to stand in front of Elsa, protecting her from the blow. Anna froze to solid ice, breaking the sword. As Elsa, Kristoff, Olaf, Sven, and the citizens of Arendelle saw Anna's sacrifice, there was a sombre atmosphere.

However, as Elsa was hugging and crying over her frozen sister, Anna's heart began to thaw, along with the rest of her body. As the two sisters realized and embraced, the reason for Anna's saviour was clear:

Elsa: You sacrificed yourself for me?
 Anna: I love you.
 Olaf: An act of true love will thaw a frozen heart.

For the first time in a Disney Princess film, an act of true love did not necessarily mean romantic love (Davis 2014: 52; Davis 2022: 665; Heatwole 2016: 7; Lester 2019: 204; Mollet 2020: 125; Reilly 2016: 59; Steinhoff 2017: 166; Whitfield 2017: 225; Wilde 2014: 147). *Frozen* demonstrated love could extend to family and friendship. This was a significant change from the focus on previous princess films. For the first and second wave, romantic love was the heavy focus of the films, with princesses often relying on romantic love to save them. Although third wave princesses controlled their own narrative and achieved their desires, romantic relationships still featured. Fourth wave princesses gave up their dreams to pursue romantic relationships and were then rewarded for their actions with their original dreams. Although romance had driven the plot (due to Anna's engagement announcement causing Elsa to accidentally reveal her powers) (Rudloff 2016: 35); *Frozen* had changed the narrative and introduced other understandings of love that extended beyond romance. And when romance was presented (in the case of Anna and Kristoff at the end of *Frozen*) it was one of respect, rather than romantic infatuation.

Anna and Kristoff's relationship was developed further in *Frozen II*, with their relationship lasting for a few years at this point. Although they lived in the castle, they were not married. The plot point that drove the development of their relationship was Kristoff trying (and failing) to propose to Anna throughout the film. He made several failed and very awkward attempts where he accidentally insulted Anna, or she took what he was saying out of context. When he finally tried to arrange a proper proposal, Anna had already left to find the source of the voice with Elsa, separating them until the end of the film. Kristoff's solo song, 'Lost in the Woods' finally gave the audience the perspective of a male love interest. After they were separated, Kristoff wondered, 'Who am I? If I'm not your guy? Where am I? If we're not together?'. Kristoff's loss indicated how much he depended on his relationship with Anna, showing a vulnerability never seen before in a Disney Prince. When they finally reunited after Anna destroyed the dam, Kristoff demonstrated his respect and devotion to Anna:

Anna: I'm sorry I left you behind. I was just so desperate to protect her.
 Kristoff: I know. I know. It's okay. My love is not fragile.

Kristoff's understanding of Anna's actions demonstrated his respect and love for her. "My love is not fragile" also implied how Kristoff understood he was not the only person Anna loved, and there were times that Anna would put someone else before him, and he would always accept that. This is a significant change in the representation of Disney Princes (Hine et al 2018b: 11), which although it is beyond the scope of this book to examine in more depth, is certainly a welcome addition to the Disney Princess Phenomenon (and certainly an avenue for future research!).⁷ This was even commented on by Kristen Bell, the voice of Anna, as a step forward for the representation of Disney Princes: 'the thing I think I'm proudest of is the way that they represented Kristoff ... and little boys don't often see representation of other boys having really big loving feelings' (Kristen Bell Shares *Frozen 2* Spoilers and Animation Secrets 2019: 2:18–2, 48). This demonstrated a healthy relationship based on mutual respect and understanding that had developed over a long period of time, rather than the few days of previous princesses (Mollet 2020: 125). Even the ending of the film, focuses on Anna's coronation as queen, rather than her marriage to Kristoff, shifting the importance onto her leadership rather than a romantic relationship (Mollet 2020: 125).

Like Elsa, Moana did not have a love interest. In fact, Moana did not highlight or hint at anyone being a romantic interest to her, it was simply irrelevant to the story and film (Hine et al 2018a; Hine et al 2018b: 12; Seybold 2021: 77). Although *Brave*, *Frozen*, and *Frozen II* featured romance in one way or another, *Moana* simply did not include it. This was the first princess film to not include romance *at all*, with the plot entirely dedicated to the journey and development of Moana, and how she saved her island. This is of course a finding in itself, demonstrating how princess films are changing, and the inclusion of romance is not necessary for a film's plot to develop (Hine et al 2018b: 12).

First wave princesses were passive dreamers, who desired romantic relationships but had no means of achieving their goals. Second wave princesses became lost dreamers, women who wanted more from their life, but soon forgot their dreams when romance was introduced. Third wave princesses changed the narrative, they were identified as active leaders. They led themselves on a journey of self-discovery and dealt with situations they faced themselves, romantic relationships were featured, but appeared to be more of an afterthought. Fourth wave princesses were also identified as lost dreamers, sacrificing their own desires for a love interest. The fifth wave can be identified as innovative leaders. They were focused on providing new solutions to the problems they faced, often through female support. They offered a different way of thinking, and while most did not engage with romance (Hine et al 2018b: 9), the one who did maintained a healthy relationship based on mutual respect. The fifth wave offered a new way of thinking about Disney Princesses, as women who controlled their own destiny completely.

Conclusion

Fifth wave princesses were identified as 'innovative leaders'. Each princess demonstrated an assertive nature, offered and received female support to solve issues, and provided leadership, as well as being identified as official leaders of their community. Romantic relationships with men were either not featured at all in a princess' storyline (Merida, Elsa, and Moana), or the princess was supported by her partner in a healthy and respectful way (Anna, specifically in *Frozen II*). 'Innovative leaders' demonstrated each princess' unique form of thinking and leadership, with each princess able to control their destiny within their storyline.

The fifth wave's demonstration of assertiveness and leadership was not policed with a romantic relationship. Although Merida was faced with an arranged marriage, she went to great lengths to reject it and was successful. For Elsa and Moana, it was not even a plot point or source of character development, it was simply not mentioned. The only princess who engaged with the idea of romance was Anna. Her first love interest, Hans, was used to highlight her poor and desperate choices because of her isolation, and to dissect the idea of marrying a man she barely knew, which had become a hallmark of Disney Princess films. However, when Anna entered a relationship with Kristoff, it was the healthiest and most respectful relationship in the entire princess phenomenon (aside from Kida and Milo). It had been built over time based on mutual respect and belief in one another. Anna did not have to choose between leadership and love, nor did she have to make any sacrifices for her relationship. Although the second, third and fourth waves have never been able to 'have it all' (except for Kida); in the fifth wave, relationships were not being used as a tool to police the princess' behaviour. It was interesting to note the three princesses who either had no relationship included within their plotline (Elsa and Moana) or had a healthy and respectful relationship (Anna) were not franchised princesses. Although they have been included in some princess merchandise and marketing, they have not been officially welcomed.

Leadership was continuing to grow in American society as well, with Hillary Clinton being the first woman to run for president. Her experience and knowledge that made her a well-deserved nominee was contrasted by her misogynistic and politically underqualified opponent, Donald Trump. Despite losing the presidential race, Clinton's mere nomination suggested a slight change in attitudes towards women as leaders. However, America did not seem to be ready for a female president. Nevertheless, American women were not discouraged. The Women's March fought for intersectional equality and the 'Me Too' movement exposed sexual harassment and abuse within Hollywood and beyond, with women behind it all. More women were elected to office, demonstrating a shift in more women leaders,

something which was also reflected in the fifth wave. Merida, Anna, Elsa, and Moana produced images of a different kind of leadership, one that was innovative. Leadership rooted in female support mirrored the female support experienced by women all over the world during the Women's March and 'Me Too' movement, demonstrating that when women support one another, they can achieve greater things together.

PART II

The Consumer Experiences

Playing Dress Up: Disney Princess Merchandising and Marketing

I now turn to a new facet of the Disney Princess Phenomenon: merchandising and marketing, focusing on which models of femininity are the most dominant. As [Ames and Burcon \(2016\)](#) point out, ‘Girls are often referred to as princesses; they pretend to be princesses; they read about princesses; they watch programs about princesses; and they play with princess dolls’ (25). Princess products are available anywhere and everywhere, so ‘any girl who wants to be a princess can become one’ ([Whelan 2014](#): 183). Therefore, the examination of princess merchandise available to consumers is imperative. Each princess’ marketing journey begins with a film that establishes her story, personality traits, wants, and desires. Traditionally, films are what many princess scholars have critically examined ([Craven 2002](#); [Davis 2006](#); [Dundes 2001](#); [England et al 2011](#); [Mollet 2020](#); [Stover 2013](#)). From this, the film and its merchandising are marketed to consumers to associate with. A young girl can:

drag her parents or guardians to the store and purchase a princess costume. She can purchase princess school supplies, princess socks, dresses, and hair ribbons. She can play with princess dolls, swim in princess plastic pools, and ride her princess bike. And millions of other girls can do the same. ([Whelan 2014](#): 183)

Therefore, we must not only examine the image of femininity in princess films, but also the way they are remediated and commodified through merchandise ([Muir 2022a](#): 7). While consumers can engage heavily with princess films they can also do this with merchandise. It is merchandise that can help consumers identify with a princess even more: they can dress as their favourite princess, play with their products, re-enact stories, and make up their own, all through princess products. Therefore, the availability of these products is important to examine, as it identifies which princesses (and

therefore which character traits) are dominant in merchandising availability, and which are not. It also identifies whether the diversity Disney are increasing in their princess films is being matched by their merchandise. This chapter introduces the concept of merchandise analysis to the Disney Princess Phenomenon, and identifies which images of femininity are promoted, and which are ignored.

Feminist media studies has situated itself within the examination of mediums such as television (Ang 1985; Arthurs 2003, 2004; Brown 1994; Brunson 2000; Fiske 1987; Geraghty 1990; Kennedy 2014, 2019; Press 1991), film (Kennedy 2018, 2019; Lloyd and Johnson 2003; Stacey 1994; Vares 2002), and magazines (Ballaster et al 1991; Basu 2001; Beetham 1996; Coulter and Moruzi 2020; Currie 1999; Hermes 1995; McCracken 1993; McRobbie 1982). In more recent years there have been explorations of merchandise and marketing (Brown 2018; Johnson 2014; Wood et al 2020). In the next chapter I explain how Richard Grusin and Jay David Bolter (2000), with Sabrina Mittermeier (2020) argue theme parks should be seen as grounds for media analysis, with Grusin and Bolter (2000) arguing Walt Disney ‘understood better than anyone else how to make the theme park remediate other media’ (171). In this chapter, I argue the Walt Disney Company also knows how to use merchandising and marketing to remediate their films and other media outlets. Therefore, when examining a cultural phenomenon such as the Disney Princesses, we must examine the wider ways in which they are remediated to provide a holistic picture of the phenomenon. As media systems continue to converge, feminist media studies and wider media studies have continued to expand their units of analysis to areas such as merchandise. I am proposing the inclusion of merchandising and marketing to the Disney Princess Phenomenon so we can understand how dominant images of femininity in Disney Princess films can be reinforced and attempts at diversity within the films are limited elsewhere in the phenomenon.

In 2018 the Walt Disney Company chose to merge their Consumer Product and Parks operations ‘to produce even more compelling products and experiences that bring our stories and characters to life for consumers’ (CEO Bob Iger, quoted in *The Walt Disney Company* 2018: n.p.). Disney’s emphasis on converging their consumer experiences to bring their media to life demonstrates their active decision to use media convergence to create a full immersive experience for consumers. This frames the Disney Princesses as not just a brand consumers can engage with, they ‘become a lifestyle brand, completely intertwined with little girls’ identities’ (Hains 2014: 77). A film is released, it is marketed and advertised. Merchandise based on the film is released beforehand, themed food or recipes are released in supermarkets, and eventually characters of the film find themselves in the theme parks. At this point, ‘Disney Princess isn’t just about the movies and

the toys. It's about the food, clothing, home goods ... a Disney Princess product exists for just about every aspect of life' (Hains 2014: 77). And as argued by Johnson (2014) 'princess culture, then, has thrived not only on offering girls limited cultural choices based in hegemonic gender roles and narrow beauty ideals alone, but perhaps more so by making "pink" choices attractive to consumers (both parents and children) as seemingly active routes to empowerment' (897). Therefore, this holistic branding and marketing of the princess phenomenon must be examined more closely to explore how merchandise is able to reinforce qualities and images of femininity of the Disney Princesses.

Firstly, I introduce Disney's marketing and synergy strategy to provide some context on how Disney markets their wide range of outlets. Secondly, I explain the origins of the Disney Princess Franchise. Thirdly, I present my content analysis of Disney Princess merchandise to demonstrate which princesses and waves were most dominant. As a reminder, five models of femininity were identified through the waves system: Passive Dreamers, Lost Dreamers, Active Leaders, Sacrificing Dreamers, and Innovative Leaders. Some of these waves and models are more empowered than others in terms of how women are being represented due to the differing character traits featured in each wave. Therefore, distinguishing which of these waves are dominant in remediations of the films is imperative to outline which models of femininity are being promoted. Each model of femininity identified by the waves system has different traits, so recognizing the most dominant waves of princesses in merchandise will distinguish what models of femininity are the most heavily promoted. Finally, I offer an explanation of princess dominance in merchandising and marketing.

Disney's marketing and synergy

In her book *Why We Love Disney: The Power of the Disney Brand* (2011), Andi Stein concluded, 'marketing and promotion have been shown to be significant contributors to the popularity of the Disney brand' (215). Disney products can be found in a variety of different shops, from the Disney Store itself to Primark. With this high level of exposure, Disney access several target demographics, from babies to adults. The most successful way they can achieve this is through the promotion of recently released films. Stein (2011) stated 'for nearly Disney anything, there is a corresponding piece of merchandise', such as t-shirts or plush toys (229). A standout franchise for Disney to market is the Disney Princesses, which made Disney four billion dollars (Stein 2011: 229). In 2020, Forbes named Disney seventh in their list of 'The World's Most Valuable Brands', with only brands such as Apple, Google, and Facebook coming before them (Forbes 2020). The next 'leisure' company to be named was LEGO at 92nd; the nearest entertainment

brand was Netflix at 26th and Disney owned ESPN at 58th, showing the dominance Disney has when it comes to brand value. With diverse choices for merchandise steadily narrowing as pointed out by Brown in [Orenstein \(2006: n.p.\)](#), it seems Disney have a large market share of that narrowing choice due to their licensing tactics.

Alan [Bryman \(2010\)](#) commented in *The Disneyization of Society* that merchandising has been a main business feature for Disney since the earlier years (84), perhaps thanks to Walt Disney himself realizing ‘the immense profitability’ (83). For [Bryman \(2010\)](#), ‘the key principle behind merchandising is a simple one of extracting further revenue from an image that has already attracted people’ (80). This remediation in relation to the Disney Princesses encourages consumers to continue to associate and engage with the brand, even when they are not watching the films. It would certainly seem Disney take merchandising very seriously, to the extent of including it ‘as a theme in the filmic diegesis’, such as ‘Air-Herc’ sports sandals featured in *Hercules* (1997) ([Budd and Kirsch 2005: 39](#)). These ‘images’ that extract further revenue can range from Mickey Mouse and Friends to Pixar, Marvel, and Star Wars characters.

The predominant way in which Disney can increase revenue is through their use of synergy: ‘the Disney company has developed the strategy so well that it represents the quintessential example of synergy in the media/entertainment industry. “Disney synergy” is the phrase typically used to describe the ultimate in cross-promotional activities’ ([Wasko 2001a: 71](#)). To illustrate Disney’s use of synergy to promote all aspects of their business (which further increases revenue) [Wasko \(2001a\)](#) uses a case study of *Hercules* (1997) to show examples of cross-promotional activities the company uses (72–81). Wasko noted Disney used merchandising, mall tours, stage shows, a Disney on Ice show, *Hercules* themed locations (such as ‘Baby Pegasus Playland’), interactive games, and the chance to win a car from the vehicle sponsor ([Wasko 2001a: 72–3](#)). All these events and products were released before the film reached cinemas, which emphasizes the high hopes Disney have for their upcoming releases. This strategy has not changed since *Hercules*. In October 2016, Disney released merchandise for their upcoming film *Moana* before its December release in the UK. With merchandise already available, the Disney theme parks and resorts also scheduled events prior to the film’s release. On the 20 November, Disney World scheduled an early film screening for *Moana* ([Smith 2016](#)) and also meet and greets with *Moana* across Disney resorts, including Walt Disney World and Disneyland Resort ([Slater 2016](#)). In 2019 Disney promoted *Frozen II* through merchandise, previews of the film in Hollywood Studios Park, and partnering with third party brands where consumers could win a trip to Norway, or have original stories read to them on their Google Nest Mini’s ([Thilk 2019](#)). This prime example of more recent ‘Disney synergy’ used for *Moana* and *Frozen II*

implied Disney's high hopes for the films. This also allows Disney to create profit before the film is released. Once it arrives in cinemas, profits (in theory) should only increase. Wasko revealed one Disney executive commented: 'It's important to us that the entertainment comes first. First, the kids will see the movie and fall in love with the characters; then they'll want to bring home a piece of that movie' (Biederman 1997: 24 cited in [Wasko 2001a](#): 72). However, this is not what Disney are doing. Disney are almost pre-empting that consumers will love the films they produce and will produce merchandise and hold events before the film is released to build consumer anticipation and interest. Therefore, Disney are beginning the synergy process earlier, to maximize revenue for their shareholders.

Disney Princess Franchise

Synergy aside, Disney keeps a constant flow of merchandise for their 'staple' character universes such as the Disney Princesses. [Stein \(2011\)](#) argues one of the reasons why Disney's merchandising has been such a success is due to the specific demographic groups that are targeted (229). Examples include the Disney Princesses, which was developed to market all the princesses to their target market of young girls aged three to eight (Interview 3), making \$1.686 bn in 2018 ([The Licensing Letter 2019](#)).

The original franchised princesses were Snow White, Cinderella, Aurora, Ariel, Belle, Jasmine, Pocahontas, and Mulan. Since then, the franchise expanded, including Tiana, Rapunzel, and Merida. Interestingly, these eleven women are not the only princesses the Disney animated classics and Pixar have produced. As discussed previously, Princess Eilonwy of *The Black Cauldron* (1985), Kida of *Atlantis: The Lost Empire* (2001), *Frozen* and *Frozen II's* (2013, 2019) Anna and Elsa, and Moana of *Moana* (2016) are also princesses but not officially included within the franchise. Although Anna and Elsa have their own *Frozen* brand and Moana has been marketed separately, the three latest additions have started to feature in some franchised products (Moana) and marketing (Anna, Elsa, and Moana). Despite this, neither Anna, Elsa, nor Moana have been officially welcomed at the Princess Coronation that takes place to welcome a new princess into the franchise. Eilonwy and Kida have no merchandise at the present time. The Disney Princess Franchise has been criticized for its branding tactics: 'Disney astutely combined the characters' quintessential "girliness" with contemporary post-feminist beliefs about empowering women through traditionally feminine attributes ... ultimately the Princess Line has enjoyed such widespread success because it reinforces traditional and conservative conceptions of feminine ideals rather than challenging them' ([Brown 2018](#): 342).

This chapter explores which models of femininity identified in the film facet are dominant within the merchandising and marketing facet. As I am

exploring the princess phenomenon, each princess' merchandise will be included except for Eilonwy and Kida as there is no data – a finding in itself.

Despite not all princesses being included, the range of princesses could be steppingstones for consumers to engage with at different ages. As young girls grew up, they may move from favouring one princess to another: 'they might start with Cinderella and move up to Merida as they get older' (Interview 3). Therefore, to keep the princesses relevant, Disney need to create a vision and a brand strategy. This was explained further by a former Disney employee in Interview 3:¹

'So the vision for the Princess franchise might have been ... "princesses that girls around the world aspire to be" or "who have the qualities that little girls aspire to have". Your brand and franchise strategy would need to detail how you are going to achieve this goal. A key factor to long term success of the brand or franchise is ensuring that the princesses remain relevant to a global audience, and hence product development and messages need to be consistent to remain globally relevant. The brand strategy acts as the foundation for what you are aiming to achieve with the Princess franchise and details the key building blocks to create long term success. So, we're going to ensure that all princesses are equal, we are going to inspire that diversity is alive and well in all of our products or messages. We may look to develop a new princess every 3 years that's culturally relevant around the world. For the Princess franchise, goals would be focused around longevity and relevance to a global audience rather than "we need to make this much profit in a year". Financial success could be a commercial imperative but not a core strategic goal. And an underlying knowledge that not all Princesses will be "equal" in terms of popularity and longevity.' (Interview 3)

Although Interviewee 3 was drawing on their previous experience of the princess franchise rather than current information, the introduction of the Dream Big Princess campaign to market the princesses to consumers reflects the idea that there is a princess to inspire every girl (Mollet 2023: 40). 'Dream Big Princess' aims to bring the stories of the Disney Princesses to the 'front and center to inspire girls and kids around the world to realize their full potential and dream big' (Epstein 2016: n.p.). But the princesses are not equal in terms of their merchandise and marketing.

The Disney Princess brand is also licensed to other companies (as per Disney's synergy model), with many businesses paying a significant amount of money to produce Disney's popular line: "Hasbro came along and paid 500 million just for the licensing fee to produce the princesses. So, you can see how big and how successful that product line is" (Interview 2).

My interviews with former Disney employees demonstrated the intricate details of the brand, all the way down to the packaging of the princess products. One former employee informed me that:

‘each brand gets its own style guide. And within that style guide you’re going to use a certain typeface, you know whether it’s for a product name and then you’ll have colour schemes, you’ll have backgrounds, so you’re kind of given a palette to work from ... But these style guides would also go out to people like your Mattel and your Hasbro, they would have to produce packaging for the products they are producing.’ (Interview 2)

The former employee explained that “Obviously with girl packaging it’s a lot more pinks, sparkles, we have foils on here. You know, that’s what little girls are looking for” (Interview 2), and when I asked how Disney made the decisions to brand girl focused merchandise in this way, they explained:

‘they’ll have focus groups. And so, they’ll invite girls of a certain age to come in and play with the product and look at the product and they get their response. So, they may have ten or twenty 3–5-year-olds come in and they’ll say, “well what do you think of this?” “do you like the colours, the hair?” They’re not only looking at product, product within packaging, they’ll have some different variations of the packaging, then they’ll get feedback that way.’ (Interview 2)

This demonstrates the cyclical and co-shaping relationship between media and consumers. They are continually informing each other. Disney makes a significant effort to brand their princesses for consumers. This is reflected in the synergy for the Disney Princess Franchise:

‘Obviously you’ve got this strong back up of movies, DVDs, all this branding that can back up, you know, your product. So, when you have, you know a princess that has a movie and is on Disney Channel and all these other items that can support it. You know, that helps sell the product too. You know the little girls – she’s watching something on Disney Channel or she’s watching something on DVD and you know she’s to have a new duvet or a t-shirt or some clothing, they have this hero worship of you know “I want to be a princess, I want to be like this princess” you know, “I want to dress up like this princess, I want to have the dolls, I want to have all the various products”, this is how, you know, Disney sells their brand.’ (Interview 2)

Disney also conducts a lot of consumer research to continue the brand's success. This may be one reason why some princesses have more exposure than others:

'Consumer research is imperative at the Walt Disney Company and conducted regularly on a global basis. From my experience consumers enjoy giving positive and negative feedback, and it is used to make constructive changes. For example, when *Frozen* was researched with consumers before the movie was finished, it was clear that children and parents were excited about the story and characters and plans for *Frozen II* were talked about at this very early stage, including how to expand the *Frozen* franchise across other parts of the company. Early-stage consumer feedback and insight is taken very seriously and often helps steer investment decision on the potential of a franchise and its characters.' (Interview 3)

Therefore, it could be argued consumer research is conducted to determine whether a princess should be put in the franchise, as well as examining how well the film performed in the box office. *The Black Cauldron* and *Atlantis: The Lost Empire* did not do well on their cinematic release and both women were not considered to be the 'main character' of the story. This could be the reason Eilonwy and Kida were not included in the franchise:

'It is often the case that lesser-known characters are not considered in the official line because they are less well known due to an underperforming film, or the character had only a secondary role in the film, or the character, herself, was simply not as appealing to warrant her addition. That said, I am not privy to the actual qualifications and decision criteria for any particular case.' (Interview 4)

It is clear Disney focuses on consumer research to inform their decisions, and although interviews have alluded that the company would rather please consumers than be profit driven, ultimately both factors go hand in hand. This once again emphasizes the co-shaping relationship between the media and consumers. They are continually informing each other.

In this chapter I am examining princess exposure within merchandising, an understudied area within the Disney Princesses.² This second facet of the phenomenon illuminates the importance of examining multiple areas of a phenomenon to understand the impact of a brand or franchise. In her book *Understanding Disney*, Janet Wasko (2001a) argued: 'Today, Disney films, comics, books, toys, theme parks, and other products are sources of pleasure for many – if not most – young American children, who learn and have reinforced ideas and values that may last a lifetime' (2). Some of these

ideas and values are related to femininity. Disney releases a vast volume of merchandise and Disney consumers experience what I call ‘consistent exposure’ to the products and, consequently, to depictions of femininity. As recognized in part one of this book, models of femininity are established through the films and in this chapter, I seek to explore which ones are most heavily marketed, and which are not. My aim is to scrutinize these models of femininity from the waves system and to ascertain whether any are dominant. This is significant because, as Lyn Brown discusses with Peggy Orenstein (2006), ‘When one thing is so dominant, then it’s no longer a choice; it’s a mandate, cannibalizing all other forms of play. There’s the illusion of more choices out there for girls, but if you look around, you’ll see their choices are steadily narrowing’ (n.p.).

Firstly, I explore the level of each princess’s exposure within the merchandise and make comparisons with other princesses. I use product data collected over four months to show what products are available on the Disney Store UK website; examining the frequency, intensity, and relative volume of exposure of different products. Secondly, I compare the intensity of the marketing of princesses with the analysis I conducted on the princess films and their depictions of femininity.

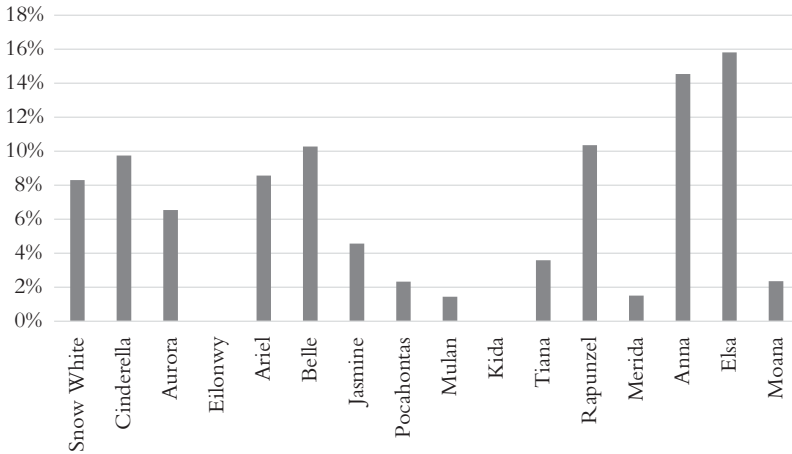
Exploring princess merchandise

At the time of data gathering (2016), merchandise was available for 14 princesses: Snow White, Cinderella, Aurora, Ariel, Belle, Jasmine, Pocahontas, Mulan, Tiana, Rapunzel, Merida, Anna, Elsa, and Moana. I compiled a database consisting of 144 web pages for every available Disney Princess on the Disney Store UK Website. Their merchandising and marketing are featured on separate pages. Two princesses, Eilonwy (*The Black Cauldron*) and Kida (*Atlantis: The Lost Empire*) had no merchandise on the website. *Frozen II* and *Raya and the Last Dragon* had not been released at the time of data collection. With these exceptions, each webpage included all merchandise that featured one princess or elements of her film. For preliminary data analysis, I split the merchandise into five different sections: Identification Product (Costumes), Association Product with Multiple Princesses (Disney Princess Franchise products), Association Product with One Princess (Standalone Princess products such as a pencil case with Cinderella on it), DVDs, and supplemental products. This allowed me to see the range of ways each princess was represented, and in which areas of merchandise a princess may be featured more, if at all.

I observed each individual web page and assigned each item to one of the five categories mentioned earlier. For example, each time I saw more than one princess on a product such as an item of clothing or a pair of shoes, I assigned that product to the Association Product with Multiple

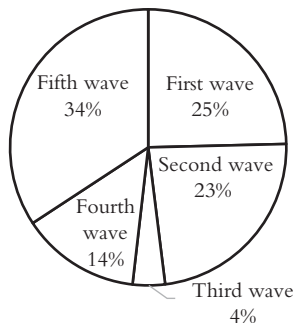
Princesses category. Once I had completed this process with all 16 princesses, I began to analyse the trends that indicated which princesses (and therefore which character traits) were being heavily marketed and which were being excluded.

Figure 6.1: Disney Princess total products September–December 2016



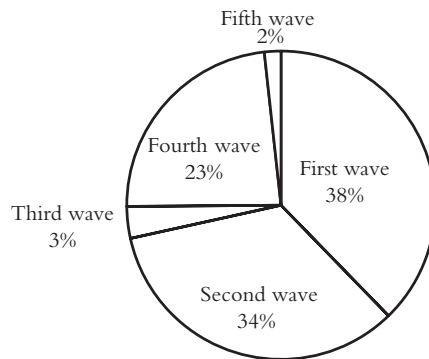
Overall, as shown in [Figure 6.1](#), Elsa took 16 per cent of the princess product share, while Anna took 15 per cent, demonstrating them as Disney's most marketable princesses, despite them not being included in franchised products. Rapunzel, Belle, and Cinderella followed with a 10 per cent share each. It must be noted the princesses of colour: Jasmine, Pocahontas, Mulan, Kida, Tiana, and Moana had a much lower share than white princesses.

Figure 6.2: Princess waves total products September–December 2016



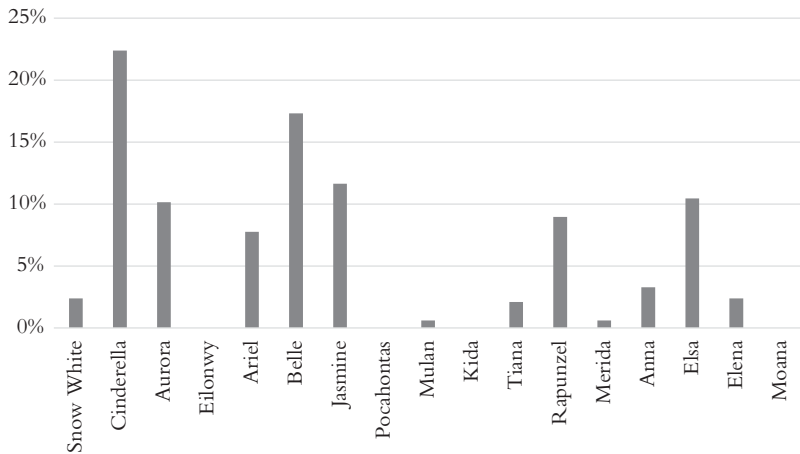
When examining the product share according to my waves system, it highlighted certain princess's dominance even further. Due to the large individual product shares of Elsa and Anna, the fifth wave (innovative leaders) dominated the market share by 34 per cent, as seen in [Figure 6.2](#). The first wave (passive dreamers) was represented in 25 per cent, the second wave (lost dreamers) in 23 per cent, and the fourth wave (sacrificing dreamers) in 14 per cent. The third wave (active leaders) were the least marketed, with a 4 per cent share. Again, a wave that featured a princess of colour had a significantly smaller share than waves that didn't. The only exceptions to this was the second wave, and the fifth wave, however this was due to the significant product shares of Anna and Elsa.

Figure 6.3: Princess waves multiple association products September–December 2016



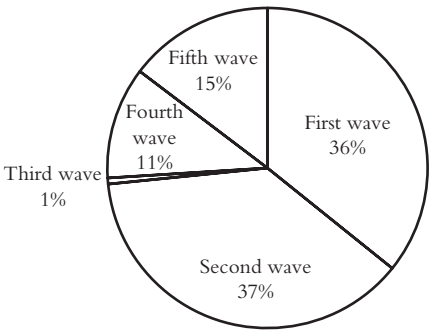
When examining how the waves are marketed *inside* the Disney Princess Franchise (i.e. when only including franchised princesses), the findings look different (see [Figure 6.3](#)). Due to Anna, Elsa, and Moana not being included in the Disney Princess Franchise, their products were omitted from this data. Therefore, the first wave had a 38 per cent representation in franchised products. The second wave had a 34 per cent share, with the fourth wave being included in 23 per cent. The third and fifth wave were the least marketed in the franchised products, with the third wave having representation in 3% of the products, and fifth wave having a 2 per cent share.³ Once again, representation of princesses of colour was low, with exception for the second wave which does include Jasmine, and the fourth wave which includes Tiana. Nevertheless, white princesses had a dominant share within merchandising.

Figure 6.4: Princess consumer choices



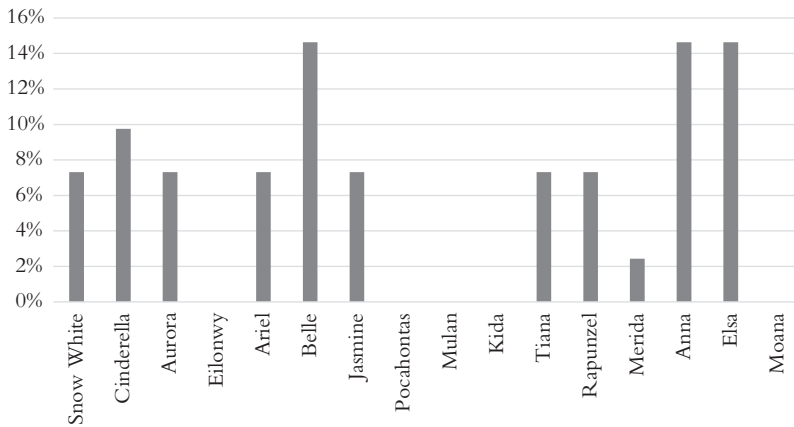
During my auto-ethnography at Walt Disney World, I reflected on consumer choices in princess costumes. I observed which princesses consumers chose to dress as for 20 minutes at different times of the day for four days (a total of seven times). The most popular choice for consumers was Cinderella, as shown in [Figure 6.4](#). The least popular were Mulan and Merida. No consumer chose to dress as Eilonwy, Pocahontas, or Kida.

Figure 6.5: Princess consumer choices in waves



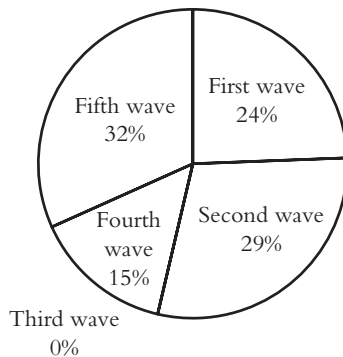
In terms of wave representation, I observed another disparity between the five typographies (see [Figure 6.5](#)). In this case, the second wave was the most dominant in consumer choice at 37 per cent, with the first wave closely following at 36 per cent. The fifth wave princesses were 15 per cent of the consumer choice, with the fourth wave following at 11 per cent. Once again, the third wave correlated with their lack of merchandising, with 1 per cent of consumers choosing to dress as a third wave princess.

Figure 6.6: Princess costumes available in Sir Mickey's, Fantasyland



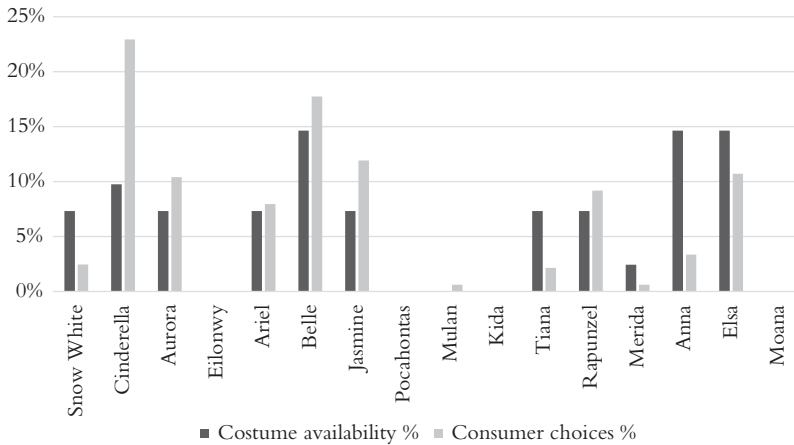
Belle, Anna, and Elsa were the most marketed within the shop called Sir Mickey's, followed by Cinderella (see [Figure 6.6](#)). At the time of my visit, *Frozen II* was weeks away from release, so I did expect Anna and Elsa's merchandise to be more heavily marketed than other princesses. Eilonwy and Kida, who were not marketed online, were also unavailable at Walt Disney World. Moana costumes, while not being available in Sir Mickey's, could be purchased at other shops in different lands of Magic Kingdom. Pocahontas and Mulan, despite being franchised princesses, had no costume representation in Sir Mickey's or any other store in Walt Disney World. Within this shop, which is focused on princess merchandise, the only princesses of colour to be featured were Jasmine and Tiana. Other princesses of colour such as Pocahontas, Mulan, Kida, and Moana were not featured, though Moana was featured elsewhere across the theme parks.

Figure 6.7: Wave breakdown of princess costumes available in Sir Mickey's



With regards to waves, the fifth wave had the largest representation in costumes available in Sir Mickey's with 32 per cent, followed by the second wave at 29 per cent and the first wave at 24 per cent (see [Figure 6.7](#)). The fourth wave was represented in 15 per cent of the total costumes, while the third wave had no representation at all. This also reflects the lack of representation of princesses of colour in the previous figure.

Figure 6.8: Comparison between Walt Disney World costume availability and consumer costume choices



Combining the two datasets demonstrated some interesting comparisons (see [Figure 6.8](#)). Despite Cinderella only having a 10 per cent share in costume availability, she was chosen by 23 per cent of consumers. Belle's 15 per cent costume share was reflected by being chosen by 18 per cent of consumers. Again, despite Jasmine only having a 7 per cent representation in princess costumes, she was chosen by 12 per cent consumers. And, although Anna and Elsa had a 15 per cent share of the costumes each (especially as their sequel was being released), only 3 per cent of consumers chose to dress as Anna, and 11 per cent of consumers chose to associate with Elsa. With Eilonwy, Pocahontas, Mulan, Kida, and Moana having no costumes available to purchase in Sir Mickey's, I also observed no consumers choosing to dress as the aforementioned princesses with the exception of Mulan, who was chosen by 1 per cent of consumers to dress as. Once again, the princesses of colour's lack of representation in the parks correlates with lack of consumer choices, demonstrating the cyclical relationship between product availability and consumer choice.

Analysis

As demonstrated in [Figure 6.1](#), Elsa and Anna were identified as Disney's most marketed princesses, with a 16 per cent and 15 per cent respective share of total

products. Rapunzel, Belle, and Cinderella followed with a 10 per cent share each, being almost equally marketed with the newer heroines. Therefore, the main model of femininity being heavily marketed was the fifth wave 'innovative leaders' due to the dominance of Anna and Elsa. Disney's choice to market Anna and Elsa so heavily is likely to be related to their film's box office success, and general consumer popularity. As a previous consultant commented in their interview, 'Clients [in this case Disney] spend their days simply trying to find out what children desire and what parents are accepting of, and they provide it to the best of their ability' (Interview 4). In the case of Anna and Elsa, the subsequent success of *Frozen* will have been the indicator that more *Frozen* merchandise was needed to meet the demands of consumers. Nevertheless, the heavy marketing of Anna and Elsa promotes assertive female leaders who support one another and have no reliance on romance.

The same cannot be said for the princesses that followed in merchandising dominance. Disney's marketing choices were further exacerbated when it was revealed that Rapunzel, Belle, and Cinderella shared a 10 per cent representation of products. Despite coming from different waves, each princess has a common denominator: their dreams *revolved* around men (Cinderella), they forgot their dreams *because* of men (Belle), or they actively sacrificed their dreams *for* men (Rapunzel). Despite their character development being quite limited (Cinderella) or curtailed and policed when demonstrating too much empowerment (Belle and Rapunzel), these are the princesses who Disney market the most after Elsa and Anna.

These marketing choices become more apparent when we consider the least marketed princesses: Eilonwy (0 per cent), Pocahontas (2 per cent), Mulan (1 per cent), Kida (0 per cent), Merida (2 per cent), and Moana (2 per cent).⁴ These princesses demonstrated assertiveness and leadership. Pocahontas, Mulan, and Kida demonstrated communication and negotiation in times of conflict. Merida and Moana produced images of female support. Despite them being produced and developed in a very similar way to Anna and Elsa, they were the least marketable princesses. It could be argued Eilonwy, Pocahontas, Mulan, and Kida are 'older' princesses, however with Cinderella (1950) and Belle (1991) having a 10 per cent share in total products this is clearly not the case. An interesting finding from this figure is how similar princesses have such disparate marketing patterns. Despite Anna and Elsa producing the same models of femininity in their films as Merida and Moana, and even similar models to Pocahontas, Mulan, and Kida, Anna, and Elsa are marketed far more. This is especially troubling when three of the princesses that share these similar traits are princesses of colour. In this case, the innovative leaders, through Anna and Elsa are being promoted, whereas their fellow fifth wave princesses are being ignored. This suggests Disney is not focusing on promoting certain types of femininity, rather they are focusing on what sells the most, or what is the most relevant. Perhaps the promotion and exclusion of models of femininity

is driven by the consumer. However, the demographics that can/choose to participate in Disney Consumer Products and Theme Parks focus groups that inform product choices made by the Walt Disney Company will impact focus group results. We are not privy to this information, but we must consider how Disney's own market research with the demographics that participate could then impact how many princesses of colour we see. If it is deemed by focus groups that white princesses will sell more products, princesses of colour will be left behind. Therefore, when we are looking at both film and merchandising facets within the Disney Princess Phenomenon, even if Disney are diversifying their representation of princesses when it comes to femininity and ethnicity, if the merchandising availability and options is not matching the more popular princesses, the impact is much more limited.

I will now turn to explaining the cyclical relationship between media and consumers. Disney promotes their most empowered princesses to consumers, and consumers happily purchase items and engage with merchandise. Alternatively, it is the consumers who enjoy the stories of these women and create demand for the merchandise, which Disney provides. With *Frozen* being a global phenomenon due to its successful film release and audience reception, Anna and Elsa's over exposure will have contributed to their heightened popularity. Therefore, I argue Anna and Elsa's empowerment in the film is not the reason they are so heavily marketed. Rather, it is due to their popularity and ability to bring in more sales for Disney and their shareholders. This point is supported when considering Moana's marketing. Despite Moana also being a fifth wave princess who was assertive, a leader, had female support and no romantic relationships, her representation within merchandise was a mere 2 per cent in comparison to the *Frozen* sisters. Therefore, more research on the popularity of certain princesses over others with consumers is needed. In addition, Moana was the most recently released princess during data collection, and even though Disney "launch a product assuming that every princess is equal" (Interview 3), Moana's merchandise was limited. A former employee explained this further:

'Over time it becomes obvious which princesses consumers like vs. which princesses consumers love. For example, children and parents liked Merida at the movies and they admired the fact that she was high spirited and feisty, and wanted to play act like Merida ... but young girls coming into the Princess franchise might not relate to Merida as much as they do to Cinderella. So even if all newly developed Princesses are given the same effort and investment to have long term success, it soon becomes obvious which princesses are more memorable or related to than others. Cinderella was developed many years ago but is still very relatable to young children. Rapunzel is a newer princess but resonated well with children because she was quite sassy and

modern. With Anna and Elsa, the storyline, characters, and music were an instant hit with parents and children, and it became clear it had the potential to be a long-lasting franchise. They're so unique it was just – the whole film, everything. I don't think Disney expects every film to create a future franchise. Sometimes you create a great movie like *Moana*, a beautiful story delivering impactful messages, but it won't be developed across the company as broadly as *Frozen*. Importantly, the products do not define the film strategy, the film strategy should set up the product.' (Interview 3)

This suggests that Disney knows not every new princess film that is released will be as beloved as their previous and perhaps more iconic princesses, and they allow this to become clear through consumer research and once the film and products have been circulated. However, even when *Moana* (which during data collection was the most recent release) was being promoted, she did not have many products at all for such a 'new' princess. This suggests Disney may not always solely listen to their consumers, but also make key decisions about promoting and ignoring certain princesses.

A factor that could impact consumer choice was the appearance of princesses, something which was discussed with interviewees. Eilonwy, Pocahontas, Mulan, and Kida, despite being produced in the same period as Ariel, Belle, and Jasmine were clearly not as popular, and none of these princesses had any form of 'traditional' princess dress:

Interviewer: Which princess do you think is featured the least in the merchandising and why?

Interviewee 1: I would say you've got your Pocahontas; you've got your Mulan who probably aren't seen as like the iconic princesses that are therefore pushed to the back just because they don't typically classify as a stereotypical princess. They haven't got the ball gowns and the kind of everything you would see with the others. They're kind of less well known. They're probably less popular films as well. So in terms of what sells, if it doesn't sell, then they won't – I doubt they they'd push it or them as much and if Mulan and Pocahontas and anything else aren't seen as the most popular ones they aren't gonna push them to the forefront because they aren't the ones that are gonna get the most commercially viable benefit from. (Interview 1)

First wave princesses such as Snow White, Cinderella, and Aurora each had a ball gown or nearly floor length dress to wear in their film. Ariel

was a mermaid, and when she did become human her dresses were floor length and ball gown style. Belle's yellow ball gown was an elegant off the shoulder floor length dress. Jasmine was the only anomaly, wearing harem pants and a cropped top with jewels, yet her outfit would still be regarded as 'feminine'. On the other hand, Pocahontas' outfit was a beige and tan short dress with only one shoulder, allowing her to run, climb, jump, and swim. Mulan disliked the traditional dress she was made to wear to meet the matchmaker, wore men's clothes for most of the film, and saved China wearing a long straight dress that was more practical for the activities she was participating in. Kida's outfit consisted of a bralette style top and a short wrap skirt that allowed her to swim, run and fight as a warrior. None of the third wave's outfits screamed the 'traditional' femininity defined by Western beauty standards of the previous waves, rather they were designed to be practical (*how* practical they would be is another question entirely) (Dundes and Streiff 2016: 2). This also raises the question of why princesses of colour were not given ball gowns in the same way as white princesses. Although it is nice to see some princesses *are* given practical outfits, it is naïve to ignore the fact that a significant part of princess culture is 'dressing up', and that girls want to dress up in ball gowns (Halim et al 2014) as opposed to the more practical outfits. When we frame it like this, and we acknowledge that the princesses of colour (except for Jasmine and Tiana) are the only ones not to be given a ball gown (or in Jasmine's case a more 'feminine' outfit), it contributes to the cycle of princess culture shaped by merchandise. Pocahontas, Mulan, Kida, and Moana are already at a disadvantage when it comes to their merchandise, as children may be choosing the ball gown style over the practical style.⁵ When consumers choose the ball gowns of Cinderella, Aurora, and Belle over the more 'practical' outfits of Pocahontas, Mulan, and Kida, they are associating with a more traditional model of femininity. The fact that princesses who do not have a ballgown or traditionally 'feminine' outfit as framed by Western beauty standards (or in some cases a castle that they live in) are the least marketed (and chosen) demonstrates that consumers are consciously or subconsciously conforming to the more traditional role models. In comparison, Anna and Elsa, who share similar characteristics to Pocahontas, Mulan, Kida, and Moana but *do* have the princess dresses and the castle that has been the hallmark of Disney Princesses since 1937. It is perhaps this shift in princess framing (i.e. do they have a princess dress? Do they live in a castle?) that means some princesses are more favoured than others. Although a diverse range of princess costumes is important (not everyone will want to dress up in a princess gown), we do still need to acknowledge that the gown is a key part of princess culture that is contributing to the popularity of princesses. Therefore, consumers are perhaps enjoying more empowered princess storylines, but only if it is packaged in the more traditional princess environment of gowns and castles.

On the other hand, especially for princesses such as Pocahontas, Mulan, and Moana, another explanation could be that of cultural appropriation (Lee-Oliver 2020: 171; Banh 2020: 138) as providing costumes based on the stories of princesses such as Pocahontas, Mulan, and Moana ‘make culture a costume that players can wear or take off as they please – a problematic practice that should give pause to those in the industry’ (Aguiló-Pérez 2021: 157). However, as my findings have shown, the princesses of colour have less merchandise altogether in comparison to white princesses (as Hains 2014: 230 has previously argued), and this lack of diversity within princess product availability could be impacting meaning making for young consumers. Hains (2014) rightly argues ‘children of all colors need to see dolls and on-screen characters who look like themselves. All children deserve validation that they are beautiful and valued by society and worthy of love. And all children benefit from media that depict the diverse world we live in’ (207). Of course, this data collection was conducted right at the beginning of the Dream Big Princess campaign, however even a glance at the current Shop Disney UK website in 2022 still demonstrates a stark difference in product availability between the waves, and while some princesses of colour have increased merchandise, they still have the least product share. Therefore, while Disney have introduced diversity to the Disney Princess Phenomenon within the facet of films, this chapter has shown there is a much longer way to go in terms of merchandise.

When examining the total share of products in waves (Figure 6.2) there are similar patterns. Due to Elsa and Anna, the fifth wave dominates the total product share, followed by the first, second, fourth, and finally third waves. The dominance of the fifth wave could be explained through them simply being the most recently released princesses. *Frozen’s* box office success (\$1,280,802,282) could also be a factor. One might hope that the empowering storylines and character development of the fifth wave would also contribute to their popularity. Based on this, Disney appears to heavily market innovative leaders at the forefront, however they are also providing passive dreamers, lost dreamers, and even sacrificing dreamers with a lot of exposure. Active leaders (who are entirely made up of princesses of colour) are ignored in comparison to the others, which suggests that while they share similar characteristics with the fifth wave innovative leaders, consumers do not seem to be interested in them.

However, when it comes to princess representation within Disney Princess Franchise products, the dominance of princesses and waves begins to shift. And although it can be argued that total product exposure is directly linked to consumer demand, it is Disney that makes the decisions as to which princesses are included in the princess franchise. In this case, the reason that dominance shifts in franchised products is because Elsa and Anna are not included. Because of their absence, first wave princesses dominate

merchandise with a 39 per cent share of products. This suggests that while Disney is aware of Elsa and Anna's popularity, they still choose to market them separately rather than include them in the princess label. While they are starting to be included on more princess merchandise, it is not with them officially entering the Disney Princess Franchise with an official coronation (though they are being included in wider Disney Princess campaigns). Disney continues to market their 'classic' princesses the most. This notion is enhanced further as the second wave of princesses follow, with a 34 per cent share of products. The fourth wave decreases quite significantly, with 23 per cent. However, the third and fifth waves barely have any representation in the franchise at all, with a 3 per cent and 2 per cent respective share. It is the women who demonstrate passivity, domesticity, and victimhood who are promoted most heavily in the franchise, while the princesses who demonstrated assertiveness, leadership, and female support are excluded. The first wave had no dreams of their own, only waiting for a prince to come and rescue them. When a child chooses to associate with the Disney Princesses as a franchise, it is the first wave they will be most exposed to. This creates a circle of association: the consumer associates with the princesses that are *available* to them which repeats the demand of the *same* princesses. Meanwhile, the princesses who demonstrated leadership, communication, negotiation, assertiveness, and female support are the least represented, which means that unless consumers create a demand for something they barely have access to, the market spread will not change.⁶ While Disney may be looking to increase their profits and their decisions are based on consumer demand, their prioritization of the first, second, and fourth waves do reinforce particular models of femininity. This cycle of association is therefore informed not only by Disney's marketing and business choices, but also by the perceptions of consumers. While this study has examined a range of merchandise, a significant part of that is of course the princess costumes that enable young consumers to embody their princess of choice. Coyne et al (2021) argue 'costumes may play a role in the broader landscape of children's gender development' (1) through the 'costumes allowing children to explore their gender development and to pretend being anyone they would like (regardless of gender)' (2). Therefore the availability of such costumes and other merchandise in which consumers can purchase to associate with a princess matter. If the first and second wave princesses are dominant in the available merchandise, this may also impact young consumer meaning making around gender roles and their own identity. Coyne et al (2021) heeded in their own study that 'parents should understand that wearing costumes is a normative part of child development but also has the potential to shape ideas around gender' (10). Although they also acknowledge it may not have significant impact on prosocial behaviour or perseverance (10), children may still make meaning around gender and

identity while engaging in costume play. Therefore, the availability of these costumes (and other merchandise) must be more closely examined when it comes to the Disney Princesses and how children negotiate meanings of gender through the princess lens.

This cycle of association between Disney and consumers was particularly reflected during my autoethnography in Walt Disney World, as indicated in [Figure 6.4](#). Through consumer costume choices, I identified Cinderella as the most popular choice, with 22 per cent of consumers choosing her costume. Belle followed with 17 per cent, Jasmine was next at 12 per cent, and Elsa and Aurora followed with 10 per cent each. As one of the earlier, most established princesses, Cinderella appeared to be the clear consumer favourite. And, with Belle and Jasmine both being featured in the more recent live-action remakes of *Beauty and the Beast* and *Aladdin*, it is understandable that their popularity continued. When the consumer choice was split by waves ([Figure 6.5](#)), the dominance of the first and second wave was demonstrated again. Thirty-eight per cent of consumers chose a second wave princess, while 36 per cent of consumers chose a first wave princess. Thanks to Elsa, 15 per cent of consumers chose fifth wave princesses.

Of course, my merchandising data was based on UK product availability, so while I was in Walt Disney World, I explored what merchandise was available in Fantasyland, Magic Kingdom. In [Figure 6.6](#), I identified Belle, Anna, Elsa, and Cinderella as the princesses with the most costume merchandise available to purchase in Sir Mickey's (a shop in Fantasyland). In terms of waves, [Figure 6.7](#) highlighted the fifth (32 per cent), second (29 per cent), and first wave (24 per cent) princesses as the most popular consumer choices. The fifth wave's popularity was mainly driven by Elsa, whereas the second wave was driven by both Belle and Jasmine (perhaps due to their live-action film releases). The first wave's popularity was mainly because of Cinderella as the most popular consumer choice. Most of these princesses also had the most representation in the Fantasyland shop. Belle, Elsa, and Anna had 15 per cent of the product share in the shop, which was reflected by the consumer choices made during my autoethnography in [Figure 6.8](#). Cinderella, despite being the most popular consumer choice, only had 10 per cent of the total costume share. Overall, this does suggest that the costume availability (that is determined by Disney and their own consumer research) is impacting consumer choices.

This emphasizes the circle of association, once some princesses have more product availability than others, that seems to affect consumer choices. However, it would also seem that certain princesses, such as Cinderella, stand the test of time. Therefore, what consumers are 'choosing' to buy results in them conforming to certain models of femininity. However, it would now appear that the issue is how much 'choice' does a consumer have when product availability is determined for them? If certain princesses

receive less exposure, such as the third wave, will they be well known by consumers? Consumers will not choose certain princesses because they are not aware of them. As I have mentioned, more presence and exposure will often lead to further popularity, therefore the most 'marketable' princess will have more reach to young girls if she is at the forefront of the franchise. This can have a potential impact on the options available to young girls as [Lamb and Brown \(2006\)](#) have pointed out. Therefore, the qualities of the princess that is the most marketable are important to consider when thinking about gender representation within popular culture. The character traits of the most popular princess may be learned through the 'princess experience' of watching films, meeting princesses, and experiencing the merchandise.

Explaining princess dominance

The dominance of certain waves over others can be explained in three different ways. Firstly, if we take Alan [Bryman's \(2010\)](#) approach to merchandising, Disney is merely gaining more profit from characters that have already attracted people (80). It thus makes sense the earlier waves are so popular, as they have been around the longest. It then also seems plausible that members of the fifth wave are also popular, as they are the most recently released for consumers to engage with. However, the character traits of some of the popular princesses are not necessarily ones that should be reflected as an interpretation of femininity. As already discussed, the first wave of princesses were identified as 'passive dreamers' due to their lack of agency, domesticity, passivity, and dreams of a romantic relationship. Despite developing assertive, rebellious, and brave characteristics, the second wave princesses forgot their desires for adventure and knowledge when they met a man, they were identified as 'lost dreamers'. These depictions for young audiences demonstrate women conforming to a very tightly prescribed image of femininity that is policed by romantic relationships. Despite their problematic character development and storylines, the first and second wave seem to consistently maintain their popularity perhaps because they have just simply been around for longer.

A second explanation for certain waves dominating the market share is consumer choice. Perhaps the reason for the popularity of fifth, first, second, and fourth wave princesses is that they sell the most products to consumers at this point in time. In a consumer-based society, Disney will produce what their target market desires. This hypothesis is supported by an interviewee who has consulted for the Disney brand. They commented, "Clients spend their days simply trying to find out what children desire and what parents are accepting of, and then they provide it to the best of their ability" (Interview 4). The dominance of certain waves then, may merely

be because this is what the target market demands (or what Disney thinks the target market demands), rather than Disney trying to influence a target market. Rather, as insightfully put, “So instead of thinking of companies being Pied Pipers in which they play a magical tune that children and parents follow, companies are actually listening to the tune that children and parents create while trying to catch up” (Interview 4). Therefore, if focus groups with consumers direct Disney to promote the earlier princesses, then it is very unlikely they will go against the status quo and start to market less popular princesses.⁷ However, as I have previously discussed, if these focus groups are not representative of all Disney consumer demographics, this could be biasing the results of these focus groups. Although we are not privy to the demographics and the number of focus group participants, there is still an argument that they may not be as representative for some demographics as others.

A previous employee of Disney supported this:

‘They’re gonna always put whichever princess is the most commercial and has the biggest financial gain to them is gonna be at the forefront. So, the most popular one with that age group of their target market. You’ve got your Snow Whites, your sort of Aurora’s and your Cinderella’s, that are all kind of at the forefront. And also with the remake of the films, you’ve got Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty being remade, um would have given it a new shift to make kids see that film again and make it more popular again. So, I’d say they are at the forefront of advertising at the moment.’ (Interview 1)⁸

Although this interviewee did not work primarily on the princess brand and was not involved in any discussions on how decisions were made on the marketing of the princesses, this point echoes Interviewee 4’s in that Disney will not heavily promote something that their target market will not enjoy or purchase. This is not to say that less popular characters will not have any merchandise at all, they will just have less representation within products.

A final explanation for the dominance of the fifth, first, second and fourth wave princesses is a combination of the earlier reasons. Despite previous employees of Disney all stating the target market for the Disney Princess brand is girls aged three to eight (Interview 1; Interview 2; Interview 4), another target market to consider is parents:

‘Also realize that while the “target audience users” of dolls are girls, the “target audience buyers” for these dolls are mothers who have considerable influence on what their children receive. The younger the child, the more mom has influence. Companies such as Disney aim

to create products that are both appealing to children and acceptable by their parents.’ (Interview 4)

When we think of parents as the target consumer, we can see how exposure to some princesses over others has taken place, as well as why some princesses may be consumed more than others. The reason is two-fold: firstly, parents will often want to expose their children to the princesses they consumed in their own childhood (Hains 2014: xiv), and the more recent ones. For myself, my mother showed me Snow White, Cinderella, and Aurora, as they were the princesses she grew up with. I was born in 1994, so the recent princesses at the time were the second and third wave. Today’s parents would have grown up with the second wave and third wave and may be introducing their children to the more recent fourth and fifth wave. However, despite this, the third wave is still underrepresented. This idea was reflected by a former employee of Disney:

‘I think parents have grown up with it, see Disney is quite a safe brand, quite a trusting brand, and they’re happy to let their kids watch them. And kids when they see something that they love they grasp onto it very easily, and it’s something that they’re shown at a very young age, that happens even easily. But um, I think it’s just something that as you grow up with it, its seen as something that you love and that you want to buy more of it and also if your friends have got it and its seen as something like, collectible thing with your friends then I think you’ve got the pressure with your friends to almost have the latest sort of most popular toy which probably is a Disney Princess doll or something like that.’ (Interview 1)

So, while parents as the target buyer will have influence, the socialization of children at school, playgroups, peers, and family will also contribute. More widely, ‘changing public discourse, through social movements, also impacts what society considers are messages children today should receive’ (Roberts 2020: 14) which will further impact the ‘approved’ media sources and princesses a parent’s child will engage with. These decisions on exposure will not only come down to which princesses’ parents were *associated* with in childhood, but which ones they *approve* of as adults. This concept was echoed by a former Disney employee:

‘Characters are created which children can easily aspire to like, or be like. So it’s very hard to find fault with them, and I think children of the age we are talking about, want to be in a world of “make believe” and frequently you get high parental approval of Disney Princesses. Often in research groups, parents would say that they feel “safe” with

Disney products, especially the movies, where they feel relaxed leaving their child to watch the movie alone. There is a huge amounts of trust from parents in storylines and characters that Disney creates. This might not be the same with films made by other studios as the parents cannot relate instantly to these newer stories as they have no recollection from their own childhood.’ (Interview 3)

For Disney then, the characters they are creating are seen as ‘safe’ role models for children,⁹ and parents want to approve of the princesses so they feel happy with their child engaging with the phenomenon. The Disney Princesses are seen as ‘innocent and safe’ for their child to engage with (Hains 2014: xiv). As the princesses perform and display models of femininity though, this suggests the children who engage with them may also be exposed to and negotiate the models of femininity produced by the films. However, society’s understanding of femininity is in a continual cycle of reinforcement. Companies such as Disney contribute to the mirroring of ideas of femininity, whether they mean to or not. This is another example of culture informing consumer choices, and therefore access to films and merchandise. For example, if parents like Cinderella because they feel she embodies certain characteristics they would like their child to aspire to, they are more likely to allow their child to watch *Cinderella* and engage with her merchandise. However, these views on Cinderella have also come from a parent’s own understanding of society and a woman’s place within it. The continual cycle of culture and gender is consistently informing our choices of what we approve and disapprove of. Therefore, this continual cycle of culture that is developed through public discourse, especially due to the rise of social media, means Disney must ‘appeal to consumer tastes, it must also represent and reflect shifting social norms’ (Roberts 2020: 14). As Hains (2014) has pointed out, while parents see the princesses as safe, they also:

have concerns. They are concerned about the way princess culture stereotypes girls’ behaviors and interests. They are concerned about its unhealthy emphasis on romance and the way its focus on physical beauty might affect girls’ body image and self-esteem. They also feel concerned about the deficiencies in princess culture’s racial diversity and race representation, which just aren’t in sync with the realities of modern life in the United States. (xiv)

These concerns highlight the continuous cycle of culture in which children, parents, and companies such as Disney find themselves ‘constantly adjusting its position as a cultural force; one that mirrors the current times’ (Roberts 2020: 14). As concerns from parents are raised, Disney respond with more

(but still not enough) diversity in their princess line up with the introduction of a more ethnically diverse princess line up, as well as more variance on princess stories and 'happily ever afters' revolving less around relationships and more on self-discovery, and with a reframing of the princesses through the Dream Big Princess campaign.

Janet Wasko (2001b) even commented although Disney is often associated with the traditional American values such as conservatism and lack of culture:

Disney did not create these attributes, but it is possible to argue that the Disney empire helps to perpetuate them. Are they the only company that does so? Of course not. But they do it very well and (at least for many) in an appealing, seductive, and enjoyable way. (252)

What Wasko could be suggesting here is Disney *reinforces* certain values and stereotypes from society and culture within their films. Disney are simply enabling already established gender roles, reflecting them rather than actually creating them. Consumers, and particularly parents of Disney's target market, will be more likely to find princesses who 'stick to the status quo' of femininity more agreeable than those who transgress it. And, as previously discussed in relation to Anna and Elsa, who do transgress traditional images of femininity, but are still packaged in the traditional princess way through gowns and castles – somehow making the 'transgression' more palatable.

When thinking in these terms, the 'good' women of the first wave who accepted their lives and could not/did not fight back against their oppression, the 'fixed' women of the second wave and fourth wave who forgot about their assertive, rebellious, and determined natures and dreams to pursue romance are those that parents are happy to purchase for their children. The stories and character traits of the third wave, despite their empowering tone, do not seem to be desired by consumers based on product availability. The fifth wave then, appears to be an anomaly. While Anna and Elsa are a clear favourite with parents and their children based on product availability, Moana and Merida are left by the wayside. This, and the exclusion of the third wave, suggests the fifth and third wave do not seem to be in demand for the target consumer, with Anna and Elsa simply being an exception due to their empowering character traits being packaged in the traditional princess framework. Disney will simply continue to do what the consumer wants, as pointed out by another former employee:

'I think they'll just try and continue to follow what the public want, because I think they listen and they're quite forward facing, like they're not just gonna, I don't think they just put something out there and say you have to accept it I think they wanna listen to what the public want and then try and give them that because they're not gonna wanna cause

a stir with society and with what, like the whole PR and publicity that they get nowadays I think they're quite conscious of their image and how they come across, so they wouldn't want it – negative publicity to them is not what they want.' (Interview 1)

Therefore, as long as the target market desires the first, second, fourth, and fifth wave, that is how the product share will remain. While I have outlined significant cultural changes, these are not always reflected by the product availability and therefore consumer choice. The cyclical relationship between the two will continue to impact the way that princesses are represented and featured within merchandise. It is important to note from my findings that the only merchandise from the fifth wave that is dominant is that of Anna and Elsa, who are from the same film. I would argue that because of this, they are an anomaly within the fifth wave, and the only reason the fifth wave has been considered so dominant within this research is due to the demand and marketing of Anna and Elsa. Without them, the fifth wave would join the third as the excluded princesses; and Disney would be focusing entirely on the first wave (passive dreamers), the second wave (lost dreamers), and the fourth wave (sacrificing dreamers). Therefore, the most dominant models of femininity were (except for Anna and Elsa), the first and second wave. I will now examine which models of femininity are the most dominant in Disney Park consumer experiences.

Playing in the Parks: Meeting 'Real Life' Princesses

In 1955 Walt Disney opened Disneyland in Anaheim, California, USA, a theme park where families could enjoy a day out together ([Mittermeier 2020](#): 15–6). It was described like this, by Walt Disney:

To all who come to this happy place: Welcome. Disneyland is your land. Here, age relives fond memories of the past, and here youth may savor the challenge and promise of the future. Disneyland is dedicated to the ideals, the dreams, and the hard facts that have created America, with the hope that it will be a source of joy and inspiration to all the world. ([Walt Disney 1955](#))

In the park, guests can go on rides; take photographs; meet characters; view parades and night-time fireworks shows; purchase food and beverages; purchase merchandise, and have many more experiences. Originally, Disneyland consisted of five themed 'lands': Main Street, USA; Adventureland; Frontierland; Fantasyland, and Tomorrowland. Since then, Disney has added New Orleans Square (1966), Critter Country (1972), Mickey's Toontown (1993), and most recently Galaxy's Edge (2019).¹ In 2001, the Walt Disney Company introduced a separate theme park: Disney California Adventure Park.

The business venture soon expanded, with Walt Disney World Resort opening in Orlando, Florida, USA in 1971 ([Mittermeier 2020](#):66). Much bigger than its predecessor, Walt Disney World now boasts four theme parks: Magic Kingdom (1971), Epcot (1982), Disney's Hollywood Studios (1989), and Disney's Animal Kingdom (1998). In addition, Disney opened two water parks: Disney's Typhoon Lagoon (1989) and Disney's Blizzard Beach (1995), as well as Disney Springs, a shopping area opened in 1975; Disney's Wedding Pavilion (1995), and ESPN Wide World of Sports athletic complex (1997). Walt Disney World's Magic Kingdom has a similar layout

to Disneyland, Anaheim, including: Main Street, USA, Adventureland, Frontierland, Liberty Square, Fantasyland, and Tomorrowland. Overall, Walt Disney Attractions received 157,311,000 guests in 2018 (Theme Index and Museum Index (TEA) 2018: 9), with Magic Kingdom at Walt Disney World and Disneyland, Anaheim ranking first and second respectively in the worldwide rankings of amusement and theme parks (TEA 2018: 11).

My discussion will focus on Walt Disney World for two reasons. Firstly, it is their largest solely owned park, meaning the Walt Disney Company has full control over the way it is run, with no external influences such as other companies or governments. Secondly, it is the only Disney park in which it is possible to 'meet' most of the princesses.² Walt Disney World, Disneyland Resort and Disneyland Paris (1992) are solely owned by the Walt Disney Company. However, Disney part-owns a further three resorts: Tokyo Disney Resort, Urayasu, Japan (1983); Hong Kong Disneyland Resort, Hong Kong (2005), and Shanghai Disney Resort, China (2016).³ Overall, Disney's Parks, Experiences and Products⁴ produce \$26,225,000, of which \$6,758,000 is operating income (Disney 2019: 39). Within the Parks sector of Disney, domestic (US) parks (Walt Disney World and Disneyland Resort) contribute \$17,369,000 revenue, whereas international parks (Tokyo Disneyland Resort, Disneyland Paris, Hong Kong Disneyland, and Shanghai Disneyland) only contribute \$4,223,000 (Disney 2019: 41). Disney has full ownership over Walt Disney World, Orlando, Disneyland Resort, Anaheim (Disney 2016: 7), and more recently in 2017, Disneyland Paris. For its international parks, Disney 'manages and has effective ownership interests' (Disney 2016: 7) of the other international parks which is discussed further by Mittermeier (2020). As Disney has full ownership over its domestic parks, they have control over all park business, licensing, and marketing.

Although experiences such as theme parks have not always been at the forefront of feminist media studies, nor media studies more widely this is changing. Richard Grusin and Jay David Bolter claim theme parks should be seen as media due to the way it remediates other forms of media within its structures (Grusin and Bolter 2000). They argue theme parks 'are full of sights and sounds from various media', (169) and Disney theme parks specifically have 'references and remediations of particular Disney films, songs, and animated characters' (170), another example of Disney's synergy. It offers park visitors the chance to fully immerse themselves in the world of Disney characters, through going on rides that are reminiscent of films or even meeting characters from their favourite Disney films face-to-face (170–1). Walt Disney, Grusin, and Bolter argue, 'understood better than anyone else how to make the theme park remediate other media' (2000: 171). Janet Wasko agrees, arguing 'Disneyland was designed to recycle existing Disney stories and characters in another commodified form' (2020: 523). Disney's synergy (discussed in Chapter 6) is a key element to its success, but also its integration

in culture. Images of Disney Princesses can be found in the cinema, DVDs, in shops, in books, *and* in theme parks. When exploring how femininity is being presented in phenomenon such as the Disney Princesses, examining the other areas they are commodified outside of the films is crucial. This is especially important as media systems continue to converge.

The Walt Disney Company merged their Consumer Product and Parks operations ‘to produce even more compelling products and experiences that bring our stories and characters to life for consumers’ (CEO Bob Iger, quoted in The Walt Disney Company 2018: n.p.). This demonstrates Disney’s understanding and embracing of media convergence. Sabrina Mittermeier argues ‘to fully understand the theme park, then, one has to see it as (a) a form of (mass) media, and (b) as all comprehensive studies of mass media, should consider its audience reception’ (2020: 8). She further argues, ‘Disney theme parks are cultural phenomena first, and theme parks second’ (Mittermeier 2020: 9). Therefore, we must continue to examine wider media convergences such as this to explore how gendered images can be reinforced.

While I am focusing solely on the princess phenomenon, it is imperative to acknowledge the range of work that has examined the Disney theme parks (Bryman 1995; Budd and Kirsch 2005; Carlà-Uhink et al 2017; Kokai and Robson 2019; Krause Knight 2014; Mittermeier 2020; Smoodin 1994; Sorkin 1992; The Project on Disney 1996; Wasko 2020; Zukin 1993) and the parks as a utopia (Gottdiener 1982; Hobbs 2015; Marin 1977), and princesses within the parks (Schiffler 2019; Martaus 2022). More specifically, Disney character meet and greets (Lantz 2019, 2023; Williams 2020) and interviews with women who have portrayed princesses and how they have negotiated their representation of problematic princesses (Hains 2014, 2015) have been understudied. However engaging with Disney characters in the parks ‘has always been a vital element of the Disneyland experience, and mostly relies on visual iconography to make the guests believe that who they are meeting is indeed the “real” Snow White’ (Mittermeier 2020: 43).⁵ This, and Disney’s own media convergence is echoed by current CEO Bob Iger himself, stating in the 2014 letter to shareholders, ‘the powerful combination of technology and creativity has always been integral to Disney Parks and Resorts, allowing us to create immersive experiences that bring guests into their favorite stories’ (The Walt Disney Company 2014: 3). In addition, as we begin to explore more areas within the context of participatory culture (Jenkins 1992, 2006) through fandom studies (Williams 2020), Disney’s consumer experiences must be examined more closely. Therefore, an examination of the Disney Princess meet and greets is an imperative part of exploring them as a phenomenon.

This chapter is split into two sections to examine which models of femininity are the most dominant in princess park experiences. Firstly, I outline the park experiences I have researched during my autoethnography

in Walt Disney World, Orlando. Secondly, I present my autoethnography from Walt Disney World. Discussion will be organized through the waves system, developed in Part 1 of this book. Overall, this chapter will determine which models of femininity are reflected in park experiences, and whether some models are more dominant than others.

Character experiences

A 'character experience' at Walt Disney World is an opportunity for guests to encounter their favourite Disney characters 'in real life', including the Disney Princesses. This includes 'character experience shows' and 'meet and greets', where park guests can 'meet' actors depicting Disney characters. Meet and greets are available in every theme park. However, I noticed, when exploring the different areas, that although there is uniformity in terms of how the theme park itself is set out, the character meet and greets were often variable. For example, some characters are available to meet in one resort but not another: guests can regularly meet Pocahontas at Walt Disney World Resort, but not in any of the other Disney theme parks in the world.

Disney Princesses can be met at their own 'character location', such as Cinderella at Fairytale Hall in Walt Disney World, or alternatively there are opportunities to meet princesses during 'park experiences' such as dining at a princess themed restaurant,⁶ or an at interactive park attraction such as 'Enchanted Tales with Belle' in Walt Disney World. However, the most common way to 'meet' the princesses is by going to their meet and greet locations. Children and adults can have a conversation and have their photographs taken with a princess. All princesses are played by an actress selected by Disney Parks Talent Casting. Once selected, actresses go through extensive training to fully embody the character.

Some princesses such as Snow White, Aurora, Belle, Jasmine, and Mulan have a meet and greet section within one of the four parks in Walt Disney World Resort. For example, Snow White greets guests by the wishing well in Germany, Epcot World Showcase. Other princesses have more specific meet and greet locations (Lantz 2023: 124–5), for example, Cinderella, Tiana, and Rapunzel all meet in 'Princess Fairytale Hall'. All locations try and make the guest experience as exclusive as possible; this is mostly done through queue management by cast members. Only a select number of people are allowed into each meet and greet room. From there, guests are taken in groups to the princess. In more open areas, such as meeting Pocahontas on Discovery Island Trails in the Animal Kingdom, guests are taken separately to meet Pocahontas, who is about five to six metres away from the guest queue. This means each guest gets an exclusive experience with a princess without any interruptions.

A typical ‘meet and greet’ with a princess will often involve an embrace at the beginning; a brief conversation; autograph signing; photos, and finally a hug goodbye (Williams 2020: 144). The princess is dressed in their outfit from the film,⁷ with the occasional additions to allow for weather – for example, Cinderella may sometimes have a long-sleeved dress in the colder months, rather than her traditional puffed sleeves from the original film. From my experience within the parks, all actresses playing princesses wear wigs for their hairstyle to be completely accurate, with a full face of makeup, and essentially will look as true to the animated character as possible. I have provided full accounts of my autoethnography at Walt Disney World in the next section.

Walt Disney World autoethnography

I was thrilled to be back in one of my favourite places, but this time I knew things would be a little different. I was more aware of the dichotomy between my love of Disney and my critical evaluation of the phenomenon. This is something that was also found by Shuler, especially when she was watching her daughter meet and interact with the princesses: ‘Seeing the pure joy on Lucy’s face as she posed for photos with Ariel and Belle and Cinderella and Snow White made me forget my objections for a blessed moment. Getting caught up in the experience as a fan and forgetting my feminist critique felt, well ... magical’ (Shuler 2015: 477).

During my pilot study, there had been moments during my trip to Walt Disney World where I was caught up in the magic in the way Shuler was, especially when I met princesses such as Pocahontas that I had not met before. I knew my current autoethnography would be no different, I was still a Disney fan, but thanks to my pilot study, I was able to consider what elements of my research design needed to change to formulate a more rigorous autoethnography.

First wave

Snow White

My husband and I began queueing to meet Snow White in the Germany Pavilion of Epcot. As I was about to discover with most lines for princesses, the guests were white children with their families. There were around 20 guests in total, and Snow White was meeting them at her wishing well. Unlike other princesses who met outside, Snow White had a greeter as well as a fast-pass photographer. I watched her interact with other guests while in the line, observing her graceful movements and gentle expressions. When it was finally my turn my husband moved over to the fast-pass photographer as he took pictures of our interaction. Noticing this, Snow White asked if

she had frightened him away. I said no, he was just going to take our picture (something that happens often at the parks). “Is he your prince?” she asked in an incredibly high-pitched voice. I paused, unsure of how to respond. When I had conducted my pilot autoethnography, I never wanted to answer or speak in a way that would ‘lead’ the princess. However, this often resulted in very quick and empty interactions. I decided to answer honestly. “I guess you could call him that”, I laughed. “Did you meet at a wishing well too?” she asked, I explained that we had met through a mutual friend. She smiled innocently, “did you wish for him?”. I paused again, not quite believing what she had said. I explained that no, I hadn’t wished for him. “No?!” she exclaimed, shocked, “it was a surprise then? I love surprises!”. I sighed internally, frustrated by this conversation – was this all we were going to discuss? I knew that this was not necessarily something she would say to a young child, however her focus on relationships meant we didn’t really discuss anything else. We took our picture, and she invited my husband to join in with a photo. I asked her what her favourite thing to do was. “We love to clean the cottage”, she smiled. I asked her to clarify who ‘we’ meant. She explained it was the seven dwarfs, and they enjoyed singing songs while they cleaned, although sometimes Grumpy didn’t join in because he was grumpy. Once again, I sighed internally, all Snow White seemed to be interested in was relationships and cleaning. While this is representative of her film’s narrative, I couldn’t help but wonder whether Snow White had managed to have any other experiences since her story ended. Clearly not. I thought of all the young girls in the queue, waiting to meet one of the iconic Disney Princesses, and what she might be saying to them, and how the young girls may interpret and negotiate those messages (Hains 2014).

Cinderella

“Hello princess!” Cinderella beamed at me. I had been queueing with about 20 people as the park had just opened. It was mostly white girls and their families, and the young guests were in awe of the princesses, watching their every graceful move. “What kingdom are we from today?” Cinderella asked me. I explained we were from the UK, and she exclaimed that it must have been a very long carriage ride requiring a lot of magic dust. This demonstrated the extensive amount of training ‘Cinderella’ had been through, being able to link what a guest says back to her own story. Cinderella told me her favourite thing to do was to have tea with the Fairy Godmother, where sometimes her mice friends Jaq and Gus would join them, but she had to be careful with the teacups in case Gus was hiding in them. This interaction was a prime example of a short one, with very little dialogue. However, despite Snow White and Cinderella being very similar (they are part of the same wave after all), it was interesting to hear that she favoured

spending time with her Fairy Godmother and friends over anything else. As Cinderella's narrative consisted mostly of domestic tasks and then desiring a relationship with the prince, her emphasis on spending time with people who supported her was refreshing, and surprising, to me.

Aurora

"Hello, your excellency" said Aurora so softly that I could barely hear her. I returned her greeting, and she took a few moments to look at me. I could see her scanning me, my hair tied up in a bun, no make-up, glasses, plain clothes, and plain shoes. I had deliberately dressed this way, so that my usual appearance (curly hair down, make-up applied, sundress, and sandals) would not lead the princesses. I could see Aurora desperately searching my appearance to look for something to say. I stayed still, waiting to see what she would do. Eventually, she found it. "I love your sparkly nails!" she exclaimed and reached for my hand; I extended it from its folded, hidden position. "Oh, and your sparkly ring! Did your dream prince give you the ring?" I said yes, and she probed further, asking if I enjoyed dancing with my dream prince the way she did with Prince Phillip. I agreed that dancing was quite nice. She explained that this was her favourite thing to do. She said she also used to enjoy dancing with her animal friends in the forest, but now she loves dancing with Prince Phillip in the castle. I came away from the interaction and thought about Aurora's emphasis on finding something about my appearance, as though she couldn't think of anything else to converse about. What would it mean to a young guest if their conversation was focused on appearance? I tried to bring myself back to my childhood, and how I would have felt if my favourite princess had called me beautiful or discussed my appearance. Would that have given me further validation? But also cause me to associate my appearance as something that needs to be validated (Hains 2014: 28)? Clearly, there is more work to be done here.

First wave reflections

The first wave princesses were predominantly focused on appearance, domestic tasks, and romantic relationships during our interactions. Based on the characteristics I identified within film analysis; I was not surprised. Snow White and Aurora's immediate focus on relationships, whether it was mine or their own demonstrated that once again the desire for romance was their primary focus. The first wave's 'favourite thing to do' varied: Snow White preferred to clean the cottage with the dwarfs; Cinderella liked to have tea with her Fairy Godmother, and Aurora enjoyed dancing with Prince Phillip. Snow White's favourite activity aligned with the domestic tasks she was regularly seen conducting in the film; Aurora's also matched

the desires she had for Prince Phillip. Cinderella was the only princess who deviated from her film's characteristics, preferring to spend time with her Fairy Godmother than her Prince or conducting cleaning tasks. Therefore, within the wave of passive dreamers, the most dominant trait was the desire for romantic relationships and domesticity.

Second wave

Ariel

"Hi there! Would you like to sit?" Ariel said from her rock. She was in mermaid form and couldn't stand. "I like your hair!" she told me, pointing at my bun, "I wonder if I could do my hair like that, did you use a dinglehopper?". As I knew from previous trips, princesses and other face characters would often use film references when interacting with a guest. Ariel was referring to the fork she believed to be a hairbrush in *The Little Mermaid*. As I used a large hair clip to secure my bun, I explained that my clip was a version of a dinglehopper, and she told me she would need to get one so she could do it too. When I asked her what her favourite thing to do was, she told me it was exploring shipwrecks looking for gadgets and gizmos.⁸ Her favourite piece of treasure she found so far was her dinglehopper. She then took me by surprise and asked me what my favourite thing to do was. I hesitated, as I didn't want to say anything that could lead the conversation, but as a guest I wanted to answer honestly. I told her my favourite thing to do was to read. "Oh! So, you're like Belle, you're a bookworm! What is your favourite book?" I paused again, I had to be careful with my answer. If I picked a book outside of the 'Disney Universe' I would force Ariel to break character or lose the flow of the conversation as she would be forced to say she had never heard of it. I explained that I enjoyed the Tinkerbell book series and she told me she thought that was lovely, and that she had given Tinkerbell a seashell from the reef once, and that the clownfish jokes there were very funny. The fact that Ariel asked my question in return was incredibly refreshing, clearly, she wanted to involve me as the guest at the centre of the experience, but also it gave the guest a chance to discuss their own interests as well.

Belle

"Bonjour!" smiled Belle, "have you seen my Papa on your adventures today?" I explained that I hadn't seen him yet. She explained to me he was looking for new inspiration for his inventions and Chip was helping him, as he also liked to invent things. When I asked her what her favourite thing to do was, she told me she enjoyed reading, spending time with her friends, and exploring the castle with her horse, Phillipe. I found this interesting, as she

did not mention the Beast at all, preferring to focus on her original hobbies, that seemed to be forgotten at the end of *Beauty and the Beast*. However, this was an incredibly short interaction, I would have been interested to hear more about Belle's favourite books, or her favourite activities with her friends. As Belle is a popular princess at Walt Disney World, meeting many guests, it was perhaps the length of the line that shortened Belle's answers.

Jasmine

"Hi Princess! Where are you visiting from?" beamed Jasmine as I walked towards her. She asked if I came from the UK by camel or magic carpet. I said I went for the magic carpet and she agreed, as unless we had swimming camels it would be quite difficult. She noticed my husband, who was taking pictures for me, and asked who he was. Like in my interaction with Snow White, I wasn't sure how to respond, so laughed and said I wasn't sure how to describe him. "Is he your diamond in the rough?" she asked. "I guess I could call him that" I laughed. "Does he fly you around on his magic carpet often?" Jasmine asked, I smiled and said, "No, I do the flying" and she laughed, asking if I did all the singing too. Although Jasmine focused the conversation on relationships, she also indicated that my husband (who was a passive photographer at this point) was the active person in our activities. He was the one flying the carpet, just like Aladdin did for Jasmine. This frustrated me, especially because Jasmine had such a rebellious character until she formed a relationship with Aladdin, her previous desire for life beyond the palace forgotten. Jasmine told me her favourite thing to do was fly on the magic carpet with Aladdin. They enjoy going to new places to discover new lands, try new foods and activities they haven't tried before. She thanked me for asking her a question. Although her favourite thing involved Aladdin, it is important to note that she is exploring life outside the palace, which was her original desire.

Second wave reflections

The second wave princesses seemed to focus more on film references and linking them with their guests. Ariel focused on dinglehoppers, Belle asked about her father, and Jasmine discussed magic carpets. Only one princess, Jasmine, seemed to notice my husband and allude to a romantic relationship, the others were more focused on discussing film references. Despite my appearance, Ariel was the only princess to comment on it, whereas Belle and Jasmine concentrated more on references and princes respectively. None of the second wave demonstrated particularly assertive, brave, or rebellious traits as they did in the films. They were very graceful in their movements and still softly spoken. However, Ariel did state her favourite thing to do

was to explore shipwrecks, demonstrating her eagerness to learn about the human world; Belle reinforced her love for reading and exploring, and Jasmine did explain she explored new lands, foods, and activities with Aladdin. Therefore, the interactions with the 'lost dreamers' of the second wave did demonstrate that the princesses are able to continue their hobbies and dreams. The most dominant trait within the second wave therefore was the focus on their original desires, despite the fact they were lost within their happy ending at the end of their respective films.

Third wave

Pocahontas

"Wingapo!" said Pocahontas as I walked towards her in Animal Kingdom. I was surprised that her meeting spot had moved since my last visit, as I recalled her having a dedicated area with a platform, fast pass photographer⁹ and an area for queueing. Two years later, I found something very different, there was no dedicated meet point, you simply met her just behind the huge 'Tree of Life'; she had no fast-pass photographer and if you didn't know where to go, the only way you would find Pocahontas is by bumping into her on the path or checking the park map. Later in the day, I did see a cast member holding up a sign near her meet point with a picture of Pocahontas on it, and I asked to take a picture of the sign. She told me that I could have a real picture with Pocahontas if I wanted to. Having explained I had already done so, the cast member commented that Pocahontas needed a fast pass and a solid meeting spot as people didn't know where they could meet her without her standing with the sign. I knew this was most likely the case, as when I arrived to queue there was a small line, some families with young boys and a few families with young girls. When I greeted her, Pocahontas asked where I had travelled from, and I explained I was from the UK. She smiled and told me that her friend John Smith was from England, "I'm sure you've heard of him" she said. After we took our photo, she said she would tell John that she had met me. Before I left, I asked her what her favourite thing to do was. "Well, I like to run through the hidden pine trails of the forest and talk to Grandmother Willow". I recognized her film reference from 'Colours of the Wind' but probed further to find out what they talk about. She explained that she and Grandmother Willow talked about everything but placed a lot of emphasis on when she is going through her journey through life, she seeks advice from Grandmother Willow. She asked if I had someone like that in my life and I answered that I spoke a lot with my mum and my grandma. Pocahontas smiled and explained that her mother passed away so "Grandmother Willow is kind of like my mom". She thanked me for the question and hugged me again, holding my hands before waving 'Ana' (which is how she says goodbye).¹⁰

Mulan

I met Mulan in the China pavilion, Epcot. I was one of the first in the queue and walked towards her with my husband before he moved to take pictures. “Did you bring your army with you today?” asked Mulan, gesturing towards my husband. I laughed and said yes. Mulan wanted to know if I was the captain of my army, and if I was a wise one like Li Shang. Although I knew the interaction was with an actress (as discussed by (Williams 2020)), it made me happy that Mulan recognized me as the leader, rather than assuming my husband was like previous princesses. When I thought about how this might make a younger guest feel, I could only think of how empowering it would be. When I asked her what her favourite thing to do was, she was gracefully animated. By this, I mean it was clear that discussing this excited her, but she maintained a graceful composure so as not to get ‘over excited’ which I found interesting. Mulan, when she was truly herself, was not particularly composed, yet here she was standing in her matchmaker’s meeting outfit (the uncomfortable dress she disliked and rearranged at the beginning of the film) demonstrating the grace that had been asked of her during ‘Honour to Us All’. Lantz (2023) also commented on this during their own meeting with Mulan, recalling:

The feminine clothing is something she firmly rejects in the film as counter to her wants and desires, and she spends most of the film in male soldier’s clothing. Yet, in the park meets, she is almost always in ‘princess’ attire reflective of the East Asian styling at the beginning of the film when Mulan struggles to present as feminine. (130)

Like Lantz’s (2023) findings, what Mulan said was the opposite of her appearance (130): “I love to train new recruits, especially the younger ones, and especially girls now that they can join the imperial army. I want to train girls to believe in themselves and know they are noble of heart and can serve their country”. For the context of Mulan, her answer in comparison to her appearance is contradictory as she is wearing the clothing she hates most. However, for me, as someone who likes to wear dresses and make up, I did find this quite empowering – I can do both. I don’t quite think I would train army recruits in a dress (though I don’t think Mulan would either), but the dichotomy that my meet and greet with Mulan raised was an interesting one. In this case, women do not need to dress in a particular way to be assertive or leaders, as Mulan proves, you can dress in whatever way you prefer. She achieved greatness wearing armour, but also wearing a dress. Particularly, she saved China while wearing a dress, and this demonstrates that women’s success is not necessarily defined by what they wear. She thanked me for the question, smiling, and I could tell that Mulan was delighted to have spoken about something she was so passionate about.

Third wave reflections

Meeting the third wave princesses within Walt Disney World was fascinating. After I had asked her what her favourite thing to do was, Pocahontas developed a more interactive guest experience. Interestingly, the main thing that she discussed was female support through her relationship with Grandmother Willow. This was something that I would argue was hinted at in the film, but not necessarily developed to its full capacity in the same way as the fifth wave. It also demonstrated her communication traits. She did not necessarily adhere to her assertive nature, leadership, or negotiation within our interaction, preferring to focus on her relationship with Grandmother Willow, and asking me if I had a similar relationship with others. Another significant finding from our interaction was her description of John Smith as a friend, rather than someone she was in a relationship with. Of course, at the end of the film, Pocahontas chose to stay with her people rather than return with John Smith. It was established in *Pocahontas II: Journey to a New World* (1998), Pocahontas begins a romantic relationship with John Rolfe (Pocahontas' real-life English husband). Therefore, Pocahontas describing John Smith as her friend did allude to there being no more romance between them, but her exclusion of John Rolfe meant our interaction did not discuss romance at all. Mulan was similar, only mentioning her love interest Li Shang when discussing the military, and not in a romantic capacity at all. Mulan also seemed to prefer to discuss female support in the form of her training female recruits in the imperial army. This also demonstrated her leadership and communication traits as well. The third wave princesses not only presented some of their own traits, but also developed them further towards female support. Therefore, female support, despite not being a characteristic of the third wave 'active leaders' was the most dominant trait in the consumer experiences.

Fourth wave

Tiana

"Hello there, come on over! How are you doing today?" said Tiana in Princess Fairytale Hall. "I'm good, how are you?" I replied. "I'm good!" she exclaimed, "I made a load of beignets this morning and only got to eat one! My friend Louis ate all the rest of them!" Like Pocahontas, I noted Tiana's use of film references during the interaction. When I asked Tiana what her favourite thing to do was, she told me "I love cooking gumbo and making beignets! A close second is spending time with my best friend, Lottie. We love going shopping and talking about when she's gonna find her prince". I asked Tiana if Lottie had found her prince yet and she told me no, she keeps telling Lottie to take her 'man-catching beignets' on dates, so they don't leave. This also frustrated me, but in a sense I was not surprised due to the narrative created

by *The Princess and the Frog*. While Tiana had demonstrated an assertive and determined nature, she eventually gave up her dream of a restaurant to remain with the man she loved (after knowing him for a few days). Although this choice ended up with her getting everything she wanted anyway, the self-sacrifice that was required for this frustrated me. Tiana is a businesswoman, an entrepreneur, and incredibly talented chef. While she alluded to her role as a chef when she discussed making beignets, we did not speak about it, or her restaurant further. Surely, I thought, one of her favourite things to do would be to run the restaurant she had worked so hard for and waited so long for? Perhaps that was no longer part of her narrative, which is frustrating, as Tiana is the first African American princess in the phenomenon, and the first princess to own her own business. I wanted so much more for her. When she discussed spending time with her best friend, Lottie, I saw an element of female support that had been missing in the fourth wave, however, Tiana then went on to say that they discussed relationships. Although this can be a feature of many women's friendships (including my own), I wanted so much more for Tiana, because she was the first entrepreneur in the princess phenomenon with a plan on how to achieve her dream.

Rapunzel

After I saw Tiana, I was moved straight over to meet with Rapunzel in the same room. "Hello there! Come on over" beamed Rapunzel. "Are you exploring today? Have you eaten your lunch yet?" I told her yes and she exclaimed that it was therefore time for dessert. She invited me to join her at the Snuggly Duckling as they were always looking for cupcake testers, "The ruffians and thugs are a bit rough around the edges and they always eat all the frosting, but I'll keep them in check for you!" Despite our conversation which only revolved around film references, Rapunzel's assertiveness was still able to shine through. When I asked her what her favourite thing to do was, she explained it was painting and drawing. This demonstrated Rapunzel's creative nature; however I was slightly disappointed she didn't talk about her 'new dream' or running the kingdom, which was hinted at the end of her film.

Fourth wave reflections

Even though in their films, fourth wave princesses demonstrated assertiveness, determination, desire for romance and a self-sacrificing nature, their Disney Park counterparts did not reflect their film traits. My interaction with Tiana mainly focused on film references, although she did explain how much she loved cooking (yet did not mention her restaurant) and spending time with her best friend Charlotte. At first, I thought this was another representation

of female support, however Tiana then proceeded to tell me they spend their time discussing Lottie's desire for romance and how Tiana's 'man catching beignets' will help her. Although this can be understood as a form of female support, it is firmly rooted in a desire for romance. Tiana did not demonstrate any of the determination or assertiveness she did in *The Princess and the Frog*. Similarly, Rapunzel also focused on film references, even when it came to her favourite thing to do. The only hint of her original character traits was her assertiveness when she told me she would keep the ruffians and thugs in check.

Fifth wave

Merida

"Hiya!" Merida shouted as she put her hand out for a handshake, "I'm Merida, it's nice to meet you! Where have you come from today?" After she found out I was from England she told me if I came a bit further north I would be in Scotland. She told me to come and visit but warned me her brothers may play some tricks on me. I asked her what her favourite thing to do was, "archery! I love archery. I also love playing hide and seek with my brothers. That's a fun game. I love riding on my horse, Angus. He doesn't like it if I ride other horses though. I tried to ride Pegasus, but it didn't work out. What's your favourite thing to do?" I explained that I also enjoyed archery, I'd only experienced it once, but I did hit the target. "Oooh that's great!" she exclaimed, "We should pose like archers then!" While we posed as archers for our photo, she said that I was a natural, and explained that she wasn't and had to keep practicing. This is perhaps special to hear as a young person, that your favourite princess, or a princess you admire thinks you are a 'natural' at something, it could encourage them to continue with their pursuit of archery. When I left, she said goodbye and a final "cheers!" as she waved. The entire experience was very fast paced with lots of energy, all from Merida. She is unlike all the other princesses because of her fast, ungraceful nature. Rather than gently waving or gracefully curtsying like other princesses, her desire to pose like an archer and her final 'cheers' really separated her from the previous princesses. There were many young girls in the queue to see Merida, and I couldn't help but wonder how the young girls would compare their visits with Merida to the other princesses. Although it was frustratingly beyond the scope of this book, it is something I look forward to exploring in the future.

Anna

As I walked towards Anna, she welcomed me to the kingdom of Arendelle and discussed the weather. We had a relatively short interaction, but when

I asked her what her favourite thing to do was, she told me she loved building snowmen with Elsa. She explained how much she loved her sister days with Elsa and invited me to join them. This emphasized the female support she shared with Elsa that was demonstrated in both *Frozen* and *Frozen II*.

Elsa

Like her sister, Elsa also welcomed me to the kingdom, reminding me that the gates were always open. She invited me to go ice skating with her, telling me that Olaf will teach me what to do, and if I can't it doesn't matter as I will fit right in, encouraging inclusion for all. When I asked her what her favourite thing to do was, she reiterated Anna's response. She loved spending time with her sister and building snowmen. I felt Elsa's interaction was very 'Queenly', but more held back than Anna, who demonstrated her 'Queenly' nature, but was not as reserved. This demonstrated the two differing leadership and support styles of the sisters.

Moana

I met Moana completely by surprise. I didn't know if I would even be able to meet with her, as she did not have a temporary or permanent meeting space anywhere in Walt Disney World. However, the night that I was attending the Magic Kingdom for 'Mickey's Not So Scary Halloween Party' (a ticketed event to celebrate Halloween, where guests are able to dress up) I noticed Moana was meeting guests in Adventure Land. I was dressed in a costume to celebrate Halloween and didn't have a change of clothes, so I had to meet Moana dressed as Kida, Queen of Atlantis (a third wave princess whom you cannot meet in the theme parks). When I approached her, she noticed my blue necklace (the stone of Atlantis) and asked if it had magical powers and if I needed to put it back where it rightfully belonged, like her own. I nodded and asked her what her favourite thing to do was. She explained she loved to be out on the water and go voyaging with her friends to new islands where they could meet new people and learn about their stories and cultures. She also liked to share her story with others and inspire them. As Moana was the most recent princess at the time, I felt inspired by what Moana had said. Although she remained true to her character, it was so engaging as a guest (and a scholar) to hear her discuss learning about different cultures, which also demonstrated her leadership.

Fifth wave reflections

My interactions with fifth wave princesses varied. Merida and Moana provided a very detailed interaction, including film references in their dialogue, but also demonstrating their free-spirited nature. While Merida did

not necessarily demonstrate her assertiveness or leadership character traits; she provided female support by encouraging my 'archery' skills. Moana's love of learning about new cultures and stories as well as sharing her own mirrored the leadership, communication, and female support she displayed in her film. On the other hand, Anna and Elsa's interactions were quite limited, yet they displayed more of a 'Queenly' demeanour by welcoming me to their kingdom and demonstrating their female support through their love of spending time with one another. Therefore, the most dominant trait of the fifth wave innovative leaders was female support.

The royal experience

Through touching, hugging, photographing, and receiving the autographs of [our] favourite characters, [we make] meaningful contact.

Merlock Jackson 2011:210

As media systems converge, we must continue to look beyond our traditional texts of analysis to explore culture. For the Disney Princesses, the thing that separates them from other cultural phenomenon primarily aimed at young girls is that consumers can *meet* them. As Kathy Merlock Jackson states, it creates 'meaningful contact'. When we can meet our favourite characters, our role models, it is contributing to how we shape and view gender within our society. It is contributing to how we view ourselves in society, how we grow as people. And all of this will impact society in one way or another. This chapter has just touched the surface of what meaning making means within the Disney Princess Phenomenon. But it has highlighted the importance of exploring the princesses as role models, which I will turn to next. This chapter has focused on exploring how consumers can have a real-life experience with the Disney Princesses, and which models of femininity were the most dominant in princess park experiences. Although there was no dominant model of femininity in terms of princess waves, as nearly all princesses were available for a meet and greet, the most dominant character trait was that of female support. This was demonstrated by not only the fifth wave, but also the third wave. This was often highlighted by the princess telling me their favourite thing to do. Again, this could vary from experience to experience and from guest to guest. However, I found it interesting that during my autoethnography the concept of female support was the common denominator. This was an interesting finding, especially when comparing this with the dominant waves within princess merchandising. Otherwise, the first wave mirrored the film counterparts, the second and fourth wave focused mainly on film references. The second wave did demonstrate the yearning for knowledge that was focused on at the beginning of the second

wave films, while the fourth wave did not seem to demonstrate many of their film traits. Some first, second, and fourth wave princesses did discuss romantic relationships in some form, but it was not the most dominant image of femininity produced by the Disney Princess Phenomenon as a whole. Of course, this can also be dependent on the actress playing the princess. While [Hains \(2015\)](#) was unable to interview women who had played princesses as face characters in Disney theme parks, her research shows that the level of empowerment demonstrated in a portrayal of a princess may depend on the actress. In addition, at Disney theme parks, the actress would have to keep her interpretation of the princess within the confines of her training. Therefore, the most dominant image of femininity within the facet of consumer experiences was that of female support.

Conclusion: Happily Ever After?

‘Consuming’ Disney Princesses

‘Disney Princesses “seem” real, most of the princesses have a long heritage, they have soul, they portray strong values, and they have qualities that you want young children to relate to. Some of the newer princesses like Merida are “edgier” but they still portray strong messages about character and morals that are still relevant to children today.’

Interview 3

‘Mass media represent a modern arena where important “battles” of meaning and gender roles take place; they are a powerful institution by which we build our personal and social identity’ (Globan and Vuković 2022: 72), and therefore are a site of feminist analysis. Throughout this book I have sought to discover how femininity is depicted within the Disney Princess Phenomenon through three facets: films, merchandising/marketing, and park experiences. I examined the film facet first, as this is where a princess’ mediation journey begins. I created a film analysis framework that allowed me to use the examination of speech, movement, plot lines, narratives, and treatment of characters to identify characteristics displayed by each princess. From there, I categorized princesses who displayed similar traits into five chronological ‘waves’ representing different models of femininity, developing a typology illustrating how depictions of femininity had changed over time through macro and micro changes. The term ‘models’ suggests two things. Models of femininity highlighted the differing ‘types’ of femininity across the phenomenon, suggesting they could be archetypes of femininity being presented to consumers. These models also produced an ‘ideal’ depiction of femininity through the policing and moderation of princess behaviour. I argue each princess was rewarded or punished based on her behaviour and attitude, whether by other characters or the plot itself. For example, while Pocahontas was the first princess in the phenomenon to demonstrate developed leadership skills, she remained with her people instead of going to England with John Smith. Although this could mean she was to continue leading her people,

it also suggested that if she was a leader, she should not pursue a romantic relationship – she could not have both. In each chapter, I identified a model of femininity that captured the overarching characteristics displayed by the princesses. This demonstrated the complexity of femininity, as some characteristics such as assertiveness, leadership, and romantic relationships were present in multiple waves, demonstrating that while the princesses are defined by a typology, the representation of femininity is complex and ever-changing. The waves system is important to understanding the princesses because it demonstrates the shifts and changes in representation, but the shared characteristics across the waves means that princesses are not being placed into rigid boxes. Princess waves will often share a characteristic with the wave that comes before them, indicating the changes in the princess phenomenon. This once again highlights the need to reconceptualize the term ‘waves’ when it comes to the Disney Princesses (as I have done here) but also in feminist theory more widely (Rivers 2017).

Using the waves system, I was also able to map out how, from a feminist perspective, depictions of femininity could be judged to have progressed and, in some cases, regressed. Using historical context, I explored whether princess films mirrored the changing roles and rights of women within society. The princess films produced five models of femininity that reinforced certain societal understandings of womanhood: passive dreamers (first wave), lost dreamers (second wave), active leaders (third wave), sacrificing dreamers (fourth wave), and innovative leaders (fifth wave). Each presents a different model of femininity. This model is either an ‘ideal’ or a ‘transgression’ and is treated accordingly. Each model demonstrated an overarching narrative, the introduction of more empowered character traits and the use of the romantic relationship in the princess’s character development. Firstly, as time progressed, more empowered traits were introduced to a princess’s character development in the waves system. For example, the first wave were passive, the second wave developed their assertiveness. Secondly, as more assertive and empowered traits appeared in the wave, a romantic relationship was often used to police or curtail those empowered traits, with the exception of Kida from the third wave, and the fifth wave princesses. Finally, the introduction of a romantic relationship was often used in princess films as a tool to reward or punish those behaviours. For example, third wave princesses Mulan and Pocahontas, the romantic relationship served as a reminder that women cannot have it all. For fourth wave princesses Tiana and Rapunzel, when they chose the romantic relationship, they were rewarded with their original desire. Of the five princesses who were not policed for their behaviour (Kida, Merida, Anna, Elsa, and Moana), only one of them was a franchised princess (Merida). This allowed me to answer my broader question of how femininity is depicted in the Disney Princess Phenomenon. In the case of the film facet, femininity was depicted in complex and changing ways, often developing over time, and mirroring the societal climate.

Although there have been two key arguments in Disney Princess literature of the progression and regression of the Disney Princesses, I have produced a 'third way' of examining the changes in the phenomenon. The princesses have progressed, regressed, and progressed again over time: there was the anomaly of Princess Eilonwy, the policing of the first, second, third, and fourth wave princesses, and the sacrificing nature of the fourth wave. I have highlighted it is too simplistic to suggest the princesses can just progress or regress over time. Rather, the princesses are a complex phenomenon where micro changes can demonstrate all variations of femininity.

I then turned to the merchandising and marketing facet and park experiences facet to identify which models of femininity were the most dominant. Firstly, within the merchandising facet I identified the most dominant model of femininity in the phenomenon to be the fifth wave (innovative leaders) due to the heavy marketing of Anna and Elsa of *Frozen*. It was noted that without Anna and Elsa, the fifth wave was barely represented at all, and the first wave princesses (passive dreamers) would have been the most dominant model. The theme park experiences facet could not identify any dominant model of femininity within the princess waves as all princesses except for Eilonwy and Kida were available to meet at Walt Disney World. However, the most dominant character trait presented in that facet was female support, which is found in the fifth wave. During my autoethnography, I noted not only the fifth wave, but also the third demonstrated this trait. The dominant fifth wave trait can certainly be mirrored by the dominance of fifth wave princess products that seem to be demanded by consumers. However, it was interesting that while the third wave princesses demonstrated female support in consumer experiences at Walt Disney World, they had no merchandise available at the theme parks, and were the most underrepresented wave identified in my merchandise content analysis – even though they demonstrated similar behaviours to the ever-popular Anna and Elsa. I argued this was possibly because, while Anna and Elsa shared empowered traits with the third wave and their fellow fifth wave princesses, they were packaged in a more traditional princess framework through their gowns and castles. When considering product availability, consumer choices, and the dominant character traits during princess meet and greets, it seems that despite the dominance of the fifth wave, it was in fact the first and second wave who were chosen the most by consumers to dress as. As I have already noted, without Anna and Elsa, the first wave was the most dominant in product availability, closely followed by the second.

Overall, exploring each facet of the Disney Princess Phenomenon has identified that the Disney Princess Phenomenon depicts femininity in complex and changing ways, but only remediates certain waves of the phenomenon in merchandising, marketing, and consumer experiences. Although Disney have created more empowered princesses as time goes

on, they are not always afforded the same attention when it comes to merchandising. For consumers of the Disney Princesses, the way they are portrayed on screen, and remediated in products and theme parks will contribute to their meaning making of the role of the Disney Princess, but also gender roles more widely. In future research, I am looking forward to exploring the next facet of the Disney Princess Phenomenon: audiences. This is also because the Disney Princesses are depicted throughout their marketing and public relations campaigns (such as ‘Dream Big Princess’) as role models to consumers. Therefore, the way that princesses are portrayed within each facet of the Disney Princess Phenomenon (especially in the case of understudied areas such as merchandising, marketing, and consumer experiences) needs to be critically analysed.

Disney princesses as role models

One of the most important features of childhood and adolescence is the development of an identity. As children shape their behavior and values, they may look to heroes and role models for guidance. They may identify the role models they wish to emulate based on possession of certain skills or attributes. While the child may not want to be exactly like the person, [they] may see possibilities in that person ... What kind of heroes a culture promotes reveals a great deal about the culture’s values and desires.

Anderson and Cavallaro 2002: 161

Lacroix through Giroux, argued ‘Disney films, in particular, “combine an ideology of enchantment and aura of innocence in narrating stories that help children understand who they are, what societies are about”’ (Giroux 1996: 90 cited in Lacroix 2004: 214). Through this we can understand and situate Disney, and in the case of this book the Disney Princesses, as role models that facilitate the development of identity for the consumers who engage with them (Zemler 2022: 10–1). And, while not every child will have a deep fascination with the princesses, it must be acknowledged that ‘Disney’s exploitation of the princess fantasy is so globally ubiquitous as to be an almost unavoidable part of girlhood’ (Nash 2015: 5). At some point, young people will engage with the Disney Princesses. This could be fleeting; it could be a lifetime commitment. Regardless, the Disney Princesses are an imperative site in which to examine identity. With the rise of Disney’s campaigns to reshape ‘the Disney Princess franchise as a feminist brand, the fandom is shown to be full of role models to help parents teach their young girls how to achieve ideal womanhood’ (Mollet 2023: 42). Therefore, princesses must be considered as role models to young consumers and analysed appropriately. We must also pay particular attention to the princesses that are promoted

the most, as like [Anderson and Cavallaro \(2002\)](#) argue, this ‘reveals a great deal about the culture’s values and desires’ (161). As [Hains \(2014\)](#) points out:

What young girls learn from the media about princesses also teaches them lessons about what it means to be a girl. Those lessons can, in turn, influence how they think about *themselves* as they grow up. What little girls learn from princess culture can shape their own identities and self-images – whether or not they embrace the idea that they, too, are princesses. (xvi)

Therefore, it is imperative to explore the images that the Disney Princess Phenomenon present, as these are the images that are being presented to young consumers as role models.

A typical understanding of a role model is ‘someone to look up to’, and ‘someone to base your character, values or aspirations upon’ ([Gauntlett 2002:158](#)). Based on several examples of celebrities; athletes; television and film characters; and even toys such as the Barbie doll, Gauntlett identified six different types of role models (2002: 160). Among these were ‘the “challenging stereotypes” role model’, where women challenge the concepts of femininity and only men taking the tough and action based leading roles, for example the character of Lara Croft ([Gauntlett 2002: 161](#)). Secondly there was ‘the “wholesome” role model’, a role model that older generations feel more comfortable exposing their children to based on their good behaviour and morals ([Gauntlett 2002: 161](#)). As Disney Princesses are described as characters with a ‘moral code’ (Interview 3), both descriptions of role models are effective to use when discussing Disney Princesses. Conceptualizing the Disney Princesses as role models was also reflected during an interview:

‘They have this hero worship of you know “I want to be a princess, I want to be like this princess” you know, “I want to dress up like this princess, I want to have the dolls, I want to have all the various products”, this is how, you know, Disney sells their brand.’ (Interview 2)

This develops further when we consider the idea that consumers wish to embody the qualities of their princess role models ([Anderson and Cavallaro 2002: 161](#)). This is something Shuler noticed during her own autoethnography. From displaying her tickets to board the bus to Disney, to the arrival of the hotel, Shuler’s daughter was referred to as a princess by most of the Disney staff: ‘He bends down to Lucy and says, “Hi there, Princess! Welcome to the French Quarter Resort”, while placing a strand of shiny green beads around her neck’. “Thank you!” she answers him. Then she bounces with excitement toward the registration desk. “Everyone keeps calling me Princess! I think it’s because I look so pretty!” ([Shuler 2015: 474](#)).

Here, we can see Shuler's daughter has internalized that the concept of being a princess is inextricably linked to being beautiful. If young girls want to emulate their princess role models, then they may also be considering that their appearance is a part of this, which may form a part of their developing self-identity (Anderson and Cavallaro 2002: 161). Coyne et al (2016) have argued the way Disney Princesses are represented on screen idealizes 'thinness', 'and emphasis on the princess' beauty may be an early context in which girls are taught that attractiveness is a necessary component to female identity' (1912). This is exactly what is happening with Shuler's daughter, and potentially more young audiences.

The Disney Princesses were not officially described as role models by the Walt Disney Company, however after the release of the 'Dream Big Princess' campaign in February 2016, it is clear that this is how Disney are framing the princesses (Mollet 2023: 40–1). All the officially recognized franchised princesses are included. Eilwony, Kida, Anna, Elsa, and Moana are not officially recognized as 'Disney Princesses' and are not featured in 'Princess' branded products, although Anna, Elsa, and Moana are starting to appear on some, but have not received an 'official' welcoming. The campaign encourages all the 'princesses' around the world to dream big. Following on from this, multiple social media posts have circulated asking consumers how they dream big like their favourite princess such as Ariel or Cinderella. Although not being officially labelled as 'role models', the Disney Princesses have certainly been characterized through Disney's marketing and public relations to be – as Gauntlett states – 'someone to look up to', and 'someone to base your character, values or aspirations upon' (Gauntlett 2002: 158). However, it is imperative to remember here that some of these princesses are 'promoted' more than others, therefore 'children who do not "see themselves" in the media may have fewer opportunities to select realistic role models' (Anderson and Cavallaro 2002: 165). As this book has found, princesses of colour are included and promoted far less, even though Disney is claiming there is a princess for every girl who 'dreams big'. And while on face value that is true, when the merchandising, marketing, and consumer experiences for each princess are not equal, it is harder for consumers to engage with the least dominant princesses. The prioritization of whiteness is deeply problematic and must be resolved through more diverse representation and promotion within the Disney Princess Phenomenon, without the commodification and appropriation of cultures that Disney has participated in previously (Roberts 2020: 12).

When children meet the princesses in 'real life', and engage with their merchandise, these experiences may contribute to their meaning making around their own identity. Therefore, how these princesses behave and 'perform' is an important factor to consider when examining how femininity is produced by the Disney Princesses. Currently in the Disney Princess

Phenomenon, the first, second, and fourth wave can be considered as 'wholesome' role models due to their 'wholesome' virtues. First wave princesses did not misbehave and were rewarded for their passivity with a romantic relationship. Although second wave princesses became more assertive, rebellious, and brave, their empowered traits were lost in their romantic happy ending. I argue fourth wave princesses demonstrated wholesome (and empowered) values such as determination and assertiveness but were also willing to renounce the results of their hard work for men. Third and fifth wave princesses could be considered as 'challenging stereotypes' due to their reluctance to adhere to the values of their predecessors. Third wave princesses demonstrated women were also able to take part in combat battle and leadership, as well as communicate and negotiate. They demonstrated assertiveness, and in the parks even showed female support (something that was not featured in their own films). Fifth wave princesses established that women did not have to fit the forms of traditional femininity and could still uphold wholesome morals while seeking and undertaking change in the societal demands of men and women. They were assertive leaders, but their stories centred around female support, and there was a lack of romantic relationships.

My experiences of the Disney Princesses at Walt Disney World did not always echo the new marketing of the Disney Princesses. First wave princesses' interactions focused on appearance, domestic tasks, and romantic relationships. These princesses were not dreaming big, they were cleaning and dreaming of their princes. Second wave princesses hinted at their desire for knowledge through revealing their favourite things to do, but did not demonstrate the assertive, rebellious, or brave nature from their films. Rather, the second wave focused mainly on film references. Both the first and second wave can be identified as Gauntlett's 'wholesome role model', as the princesses discussed 'safe' subjects, rather than demonstrating any kind of assertiveness. Experiences with third wave princesses emphasized how the characters would challenge stereotypes. This was certainly a change from the traditional narrative of the first and second wave princesses within the theme parks. Pocahontas and Mulan both demonstrated female support, and only mentioned men in relation to their rank or status as a friend. Perhaps more conversations about female support and in Mulan's case, leadership where women and girls play an active role will lead to young girls envisioning their dreams through their princess role model's adventures.

Fourth wave princesses did not reflect their values and gender models throughout my experiences with them. Tiana and Rapunzel both dream of a better life, and do strive for it, until they ultimately choose their love interest at the end of the film. However, both princesses are still 'rewarded' with their desires, with the achievement of their dreams being the added 'bonus' of their happy ending – these princesses can truly 'have it all' if they sacrifice

their own dreams first. During both experiences, Tiana and Rapunzel focused on film references, with the former hinting at desiring romantic relationships alongside her best friend Charlotte, and Rapunzel suggesting an assertive nature when communicating with the ruffians and thugs. However, their determination for their dreams was not mentioned at all.

Fifth wave princesses did reflect some of their qualities identified in previous chapters. Merida encouraged my archery skills, proving female support in the experience; Moana demonstrated her communication and leadership skills through her love of sharing her story and experiencing new cultures; although my interactions with Anna and Elsa were limited, their show of female support for one another was clear in both interactions.

There was a clear difference of experience between the different waves of princesses. Understandably, when in the role of a Disney Princess, the actress must know everything about the character and be able to mimic the princess from their walk to their hand gestures. Therefore, a character experience with a first wave princess such as Aurora is going to be very different to an experience with a third wave princess such as Mulan. However, in my experience some princess behaviour – specifically those in the second and fourth wave – did not reflect their representation in the films. Therefore, intentionally or not, these princesses are role models to consumers. The outcome of the princess phenomenon is that these heroines are role models consumers can not only identify with through films and merchandise, but they can physically meet in person. Additionally, some princess role models are given more exposure to consumers than others. The fifth, first, and second wave are the princesses that have the most merchandise and have the more popular meet and greets in theme parks. Representation is one way in which children form their self-identity, and if there is only a narrow definition of what ‘being a girl’ is through what is available for them to consume, then young girls will be unable to break out of pre-prescribed gender roles. Especially when the most empowered princesses the phenomenon has produced (apart from Elsa and Anna) are the most undermarketed.

As [Lamb and Brown \(2006\)](#) have stated, ‘Disney’s version of girlhood is everywhere’ (66), however the question for me has been what image of femininity in Disney’s version of girlhood has been the most dominant? As previously mentioned, in the case of merchandising, Anna and Elsa were the most dominantly marketed princesses, which led to the fifth wave being the most dominant wave. However, without Anna and Elsa, the fifth wave had barely any marketing at all. This led to the most dominant waves being that of the first and second wave, with the third wave being the least dominant. If it wasn’t for Anna and Elsa, Disney’s overarching version of girlhood would in fact be that of passive and lost dreamers. The *Frozen* sisters are an anomaly, as despite Merida, Moana, and even the third wave princesses

sharing very similar characteristics, they are the least marketed princesses. As discussed in the chapter on merchandising, this may be because Anna and Elsa's empowered storyline is framed within the traditional princess packaging of gowns and castles. The differences between princesses more widely are also highlighted by [Zemler \(2022\)](#):

That sense of equality is represented in many Disney films. True feminism means that an individual can be whatever they want to be, unrestricted by any societal mores or pressures. Women can be fierce warriors or gentle homemakers, and both are equally valid expressions of self. No one character has to represent everyone, which is why it's so amazing that there's a Disney Princess – or a Frozen queen – for everyone. (163)

In this sense, there is a wide range of princesses expressing femininity in a variety of ways, perhaps there is a princess for everyone. The princess phenomenon is complex and nuanced, it is not a case that some waves are 'good' and some are 'bad'. As Amy [Davis \(2006\)](#) says, 'none of them are perfect' (225). But there are some models of femininity presented by certain waves that are not as empowered as others, and it is often these waves who are the most dominant. So, while Disney may be heavily marketing two innovative leaders, it is really the passive and lost dreamers who are the most exposed 'role models' to young consumers. And although femininity is complex and shifting, it is important that consumers are seeing the diversity of the princess waves, rather than just the dominant few.

The future of the Disney Princess Phenomenon

Over the course of Disney's decades-long history, the company has created some of the most influential onscreen characters in the world, and their impact can't be underestimated.

[Zemler 2022](#): 161

This comprehensive study of the different facets of the Disney Princess Phenomenon can be used as a lens to view and understand their contribution to the depiction of femininity. Through in-depth analysis, I have identified micro changes within the princess phenomenon (which included non-franchised princesses) that could be easily lost in an overview of the franchise or phenomenon. I have provided a deeper insight to the phenomenon to expose how it has progressed and regressed from a feminist and gendered perspective over time. It also examined the princesses within their key representations: films, merchandise, and park experiences. Through

analysing each key facet, I have provided a comprehensive understanding of how each of these princess experiences are inextricably linked for the consumer. I have explored the patterns and dominant models within these key representations, and how models from the films are being reinforced through other consumer outlets, resulting in further model exposure to the consumer. This understanding of the breadth and depth of the phenomenon leads to three key implications.

Challenging representation within popular culture

Firstly, popular culture contributes to the shaping of people's understanding and beliefs. As Emily Zemler (2022) notes in *Disney Princess: Beyond the Tiara*, 'character's qualities and actions inspire us, teach us positive values, and encourage us to follow our own dreams' (161). Therefore, there should be a level of responsibility afforded to those who produce that popular culture, who frame those actions and positive values within the media (Hains 2014). And while Disney themselves have acknowledged their awareness of this responsibility (Zemler 2022: 162), consumers should be empowered to explore and critically engage with the Disney Princess Phenomenon and the images of femininity it depicts (Hains 2014). To challenge gender roles within society, we must challenge the sources that perpetuate them, critically analysing what is being produced for our consumption (Colombo and Muir 2020: 17; Hains 2014). While I understand there are a great number of factors that influence our interpretation and understanding of gender (environment, family, peers, education, for example), the media, and more specifically popular culture, are so dominant in our society that what they produce must be examined critically. To do this, we must begin within influential and overarching brands such as Disney, Universal, DreamWorks, and other film studios as well as toy makers. This book is contributing to a breadth of research that is critically evaluating media sources, and its impact on consumers. Coyne et al (2016) argue: 'There is some public concern regarding the effect that Disney Princesses may have on young girls (e.g. Orenstein, 2011). However, there is little empirical research examining how Disney Princesses are portrayed in the media and what effect they might have on children's gender role development, attitudes, and behavior' (1909).

This book has provided a foundational understanding of the different remediations of the Disney Princess Phenomenon and considers how these different remediations may be interpreted by audiences. Of course, I agree with Coyne et al (2016) and Zsubori (2021) that more research needs to be done with audiences to explore this further (Hains 2014; Natasia and Uppal 2015; Pike 2015; Uppal 2019; Wohlwend 2009, 2012, 2015; Zsubori 2023), which I look forward to continuing. The Disney Princesses inspire

people of all ages in different ways (Zemler 2022: 168), and their impact is yet to be fully measured.

This foundational understanding of the three different facets of the Disney Princess Phenomenon can be built on further by Coyne et al's (2016) use of social cognitive theory of gender development in relation to the Disney Princesses. The theory 'explains how exposure to gender-stereotyped behavior in the media and playing with gendered toys may have an influence on the development of gender stereotypes and gendered behavior in young children' (Bussey and Bandura 1999 cited in Coyne et al 2016: 1911). This development is through two elements: modelling and direct tuition. In this instance I will focus on modelling:

Children learn gendered behavior by watching others, including parents, peers, teachers, and the media. In this process, children tend to learn best from powerful, salient, attractive, same-gender models ... Disney Princesses represent salient, powerful, attractive characters who tend to be portrayed as conforming to gender stereotypes and are rewarded for their gendered behavior (England et al 2011). Accordingly, this theory would suggest that Disney Princesses may be a particularly potent model for the learning of gendered behavior in children. (Coyne et al 2016: 1911)

This is particularly insightful when compared to my own findings. Each princess 'wave' produces a 'model' of femininity, which when applying the notion of modelling, could result in young people learning or making meaning from particular princess behaviours, attributes, and characteristics. Something particularly striking with the princesses is the aforementioned policing of empowered characteristics with romantic relationships (as seen with the second, third, and fourth wave princesses), Coyne et al (2016) discuss this in relation to modelling, explaining 'models who are rewarded for their behavior ... should be particularly influential' (1911). It was clear within the merchandising and marketing facets that some waves were marketed (or 'rewarded') more than others, and therefore may become the most influential within the phenomenon, and the most 'available' princesses for consumers to engage with. Coyne et al (2016) found 'higher princess engagement was associated with increased female gender-stereotypical behavior for both girls and boys' in their longitudinal study (1921). With the Disney Princesses being such a dominant feature of girlhood, understanding which models of femininity the princesses produce (through the film facet) and which are dominant (through the merchandising, marketing, and consumer experiences facets) is imperative to understanding what meaning may be made from the phenomenon by audiences, and therefore which princess attributes may be adopted by audiences.

Challenging representation within the Disney Princess Phenomenon through media literacy

I hope this book may inspire parents to use media literacy to critically engage with the content their children engage with. Like [Hains \(2014\)](#) *The Princess Problem: Guiding Our Girls Through the Princess-Obsessed Years*, I hope this book sparks conversation about whether, for example, it was okay for Snow White and Cinderella to endure the cruelty of their families, or why the story of Snow White, Cinderella, Aurora, Eilonwy, Ariel, Belle, and Jasmine ended when they started their romantic relationships. This will also empower audiences to challenge the dominant gender norms produced by popular culture, which in time will influence film studios to change their representations of gender. This book provides scholars, students, and audiences alike with a transferable film framework to analyse how gender is presented within films, and I encourage them to do so to uncover their own critical analysis of cultural phenomenon we engage with daily. As [Hains \(2014\)](#) says, ‘the goal is not to persuade girls that princesses are bad or to “de-princess” them. Rather, it is to help girls reason through the problems with princesses and see that there are many other ways to be a girl’ (xvii), and a princess, for that matter.

Transferable film framework for future research

Regarding the wider field of media and feminist media studies, I have created a transferable and flexible film analysis framework that can be used to examine macro and micro changes within different phenomena. Due to the adaptable nature of the framework, it can be used to examine masculinity as well as femininity. I also argue it can be used to continue to foster newer areas of research within Disney such as the representation of sexuality, race, and disability. I would encourage for this framework to be adapted to explore these different areas across the many facets of the Disney Princesses and Disney more widely. For feminist media studies, this framework can act as a complimentary structure to interpret how gender is represented across mediated platforms and could also be used in audience research within those mediations. It asks questions that feminist media scholars have asked for decades and can be adapted to examine media from an intersectional perspective.

The princess as the political

The use of this framework, and the results of it within this book has demonstrated that the ‘princesses are the political’, not only due to their vast presence within the children’s entertainment and toy market, but also

because of their identity as role models to the children who consume them. The findings of this research indicate which images of femininity are the most dominant within princess waves, and which princess waves are exposed to consumers the most. This demonstrated how femininity has been disseminated within this worldwide phenomenon. Therefore, we must see the princesses as the political to investigate how femininity is being constructed in spheres that are often seen as trivial yet may have a significant impact on young people's development and their understanding of gender. When the princess films and merchandise are so embedded within culture, we must examine them to identify the cultural messages of gender within the Disney Princess Phenomenon. It is my hope that researchers and audiences alike will be able to use the framework detailed within this book to produce their own typologies of phenomena, which will contribute to our wider understanding of the place of popular culture in our lives.

Notes

Introduction

- ¹ In 2021, Disney released *Raya and the Last Dragon*, the heroine (Raya) and antagonist (Namaari) whom I also argue are princesses. However, due to the time of release this film fell outside of my analysis – I am looking forward to including Raya and Namaari in my future research. There has also been research conducted on *Elena of Avalor* (2016) (Aguiló-Pérez 2021; Leon-Boys 2021a, 2021b, 2023), featured on the Disney Channel as a television series. As I am focusing on films, Elena was not included in this analysis. However, as Aguiló-Pérez (2021) points out, the fact that Elena is not included in the official Disney Princess Franchise, and nor has Elena been given her own feature film, ‘Disney still positioned Latinx culture in the background’ (155). Exploring TV adaptations could be an additional facet to the Disney Princess Phenomenon, showing the flexibility of facet methodology (Muir 2022a).
- ² Of course, engagement with the Disney Princesses is not exclusive to children, many adults (including myself) engage with the Disney Princess Phenomenon, another avenue for future research (Mollet 2023) I will be undertaking in the future. Especially considering the media discourse around ‘Disney Adults’ (Dickson 2022; Sampson 2022; Schwartz 2022).
- ³ For a more in-depth explanation of my use of facet methodology for the Disney Princess Phenomenon, please see Muir (2022a).
- ⁴ This is not the case for all princess heroines that are included in the phenomenon. Eilonwy, Kida, Anna, Elsa, and Moana have not had a coronation ceremony. As of 2022, Anna, Elsa, Moana, and Raya have started to be included in elements of Disney Princess Franchise marketing and merchandise but have yet to receive their ‘coronation’.
- ⁵ For a more in-depth explanation of how I used facet methodology in my research, please see Muir (2022a). For an introduction to facet methodology, please see Mason (2011).

Introducing the Film Analysis Framework

- ¹ I acknowledge that defining feminism according to waves has been ‘a contentious issue’ (Rivers 2017: 20). However, I am using Rivers’ reconceptualization of waves to acknowledge how the term can demonstrate the complexity of the Disney Princess Phenomenon.

Chapter 1

- ¹ O’Brien (1996) also discusses this in relation to the treatment of the stepsisters, suggesting that the plot changes made in *Cinderella* (1950) represented the ‘simplification of gender roles’ (161). They go on to argue that, while in the Perrault fairytale Cinderella helps her stepsisters to marry, the Disney version:

highlights the differences between Cinderella and her stepsisters, in terms of grace, beauty, charm, cooking, and cleaning, to demonstrate to audiences the qualities that a woman needs if she wants to get married, and therefore be happy and fulfilled. In Disney's fairy tales, women who do not possess these traits (i.e. who do not embrace patriarchal values) never find 'happiness'. (O'Brien 1996: 161–2)

This certainly implies that Cinderella, who did embody all of these traits, was projected as someone who had more desirable qualities to emulate.

- ² In Cinderella's sequel film, *Cinderella II: Dreams Come True*, Cinderella struggled to adapt to royal life, preferring to do things such as bake and cook for herself. A closer analysis of this film in future research would be needed to assess whether Cinderella did continue to perform domestic tasks.
- ³ Cinderella did demonstrate confidence and assertiveness at some points. For example, when she was mocked by her stepsisters for asking to go to the ball, Cinderella pointed out that she was also eligible to go: "Well why not? After all, I'm still a member of the family. And it says, 'By royal command, every eligible maiden is to attend!'". It was this display of assertiveness that allowed her an opportunity to go to the ball, although Lady Tremaine sought to sabotage it by overloading her with chores (Davis 2006: 101). The only other display of confidence and assertiveness was at the very end of the film when Cinderella was able to escape the tower in time to ask the Grand Duke if she could try on the glass slipper. Even when Lady Tremaine caused the slipper to be dropped and destroyed, Cinderella simply produced the other slipper, guaranteeing her freedom (Davis 2006: 102). Nevertheless, these are the only two displays of confidence and assertiveness throughout *Cinderella*, with the rest of the film consisting of Cinderella's docile and passive behaviour.
- ⁴ For more on the comparison between evil women and princesses, please see Davis 2006 and Muir 2022b.
- ⁵ In fact, Snow White's beauty was the catalyst for the Evil Queen's actions, therefore she was punished and then rewarded for her beauty (Muir 2022b).

Chapter 2

- ¹ On 24 June 2022, *Roe v Wade* (1973) was overturned, meaning that anyone with the capacity for pregnancy did not have a constitutional right to an abortion.
- ² Perhaps due to *The Black Cauldron*'s lack of box office success, there is very little research conducted on Eilonwy (Davis 2006). Many scholars do not acknowledge her when discussing the princesses. This is most likely due to Eilonwy's exclusion from the princess franchise, so for many, the resurgence of the Disney Princesses began in 1989 with *The Little Mermaid*.
- ³ Keisha Hoerner (1996) notes that Ursula is one of the few female villains to commit an act of violence, her 'violent attack on King Triton, Ariel, and Prince Eric during the final battle in *The Little Mermaid*' (224) involved turning Triton into a sea urchin and trying to kill both Ariel and Eric. This contrast between Ursula and Ariel is striking, as the audience does not see Ariel commit an act of violence unless it is purely by accident, whereas Ursula does so without a second thought.
- ⁴ Although Jasmine desired a life outside the palace, it became very clear once she left that she was not prepared. She had no concept of money and could not understand why people wouldn't listen to her as a peasant woman.
- ⁵ Jane Cummins (1995) points out however, that the emphasis on Belle's reading 'overlook[s] what Belle actually chooses to read' (24), referring to the romance elements of Belle's reading material. So although Belle may be the first Disney Princess to demonstrate an interest in reading, the only books the audience sees her engaging with are ones of

romance. This is not necessarily an issue as women's book choices have been trivialized before (Radway 1991), but it does continually emphasize the 'romance' element of Belle's narrative.

- ⁶ Eric did take Ariel out in a carriage so that she could see the kingdom, something she was enthusiastic about. She was able to explore new environments and try new things, just like she had initially desired. However, this was the only part in the film where the audience could see Ariel doing what she originally set out to do.

Chapter 3

- ¹ For an in-depth discussion of the Mattaponi oral history of Pocahontas' life, please see Lee-Oliver (2020).
- ² It is important to note the depiction of Chinese culture in *Mulan* was 'stripped of context and embed historical inaccuracies such as the episode with the matchmaker, the presence of the Huns, the presence of the shrine to the ancestors, the clothing, and presenting villains as darker-skinned' (Anjirbag 2018:5), while my analysis is based on what is represented in the films, it is imperative to understand that Disney's film adaptations of other cultures have been problematic, despite them attempting to diversify their princess line.
- ³ Yin (2011) has further argued that 'the issue is not whether China is the most sexist culture or not, or even whether patriarchy exists in China or not. The question is what kind of Chinese values are deposed by Disney to reinforce dominant racial and gender ideologies' (64–5) through a comparison of Disney's *Mulan* (1998) and the Chinese *Ballad of Mulan*.

Chapter 4

- ¹ For a deeper reading of the representation of Tiana's Black female body in *The Princess and the Frog*, please see Moffitt (2019) and Turner (2013). For a deeper reading of the representation of race in *The Princess and the Frog*, please see Gehlawat (2010) and Gregory (2010).
- ² Tiana's father also dreamed of opening his own restaurant but died before he was able to act on it.
- ³ This was an interesting contrast for Naveen, as he also seemed to have fallen in love with someone he had known for a few days. Like Tiana, Naveen was willing to sacrifice his dream (which was a relationship with Tiana) so Tiana could have her restaurant. Although this book has not focused on images of masculinity, it was interesting to note that Naveen was being just as self-sacrificing as Tiana, but it seemed to be framed in a different way. Perhaps the solution would have been for Tiana and Naveen to have become friends, and the finality of the narrative came from them both learning something. Naveen learns the power of hard work, and Tiana learns to relax. The introduction of the potential relationship between Tiana and Naveen is what causes the self-sacrificing nature of them both.

Chapter 5

- ¹ As of March 2020, Harvey Weinstein has been sentenced to 23 years in prison for sexual abuse (Aratani and Pilkington 2020).
- ² In 2021, Kamala Harris became the first woman, and the first African American and first Asian American Vice President of the United States (BBC 2021). This was a huge step forward for women's politics, particularly for women of colour. However, this was after the fifth wave films in this analysis were released.
- ³ For a more in-depth analysis of *Moana* and the 'Oceanic Story Trust', please see Anjirbag (2018). For an in-depth analysis of the visibility and invisibility of Polynesian culture in *Moana*, please see Banh (2020).

- ⁴ As [Hine et al \(2018b\)](#) have suggested, there is very little quantitative or qualitative scholarly work on Disney Princess films released after 2003. Therefore, this chapter will focus on the primary data from my own analysis.
- ⁵ For an ecofeminist reading of *Frozen II* please see [Putri and Retnaningdyah \(2021\)](#).
- ⁶ This was a first in Disney Princess films, Elsa's words not only addressed Anna's choices, but also the choices of previous princesses ([Davis 2014](#): 51).
- ⁷ For research on representation of masculinity in Disney Princes, please see [Davis \(2013\)](#) and [England et al \(2011\)](#).

Chapter 6

- ¹ Interviewee 3 no longer works for Disney and is therefore not privy to the actual brand strategy of the franchise now, they are drawing on their past experience in the company.
- ² For an exploration of Disney Princess fashion and costumes, please see [van Dam \(2022\)](#).
- ³ Although princesses such as Anna, Elsa, and Moana have started to be included within certain Disney Princess campaigns, they still haven't had an official coronation ceremony, so their status is still vague.
- ⁴ This has also been acknowledged by [Nash \(2015\)](#), who explained that in a brief merchandise search, it was clear Pocahontas and Mulan had very little product representation (13–4).
- ⁵ [Hains \(2014\)](#) provides an alternative viewpoint. Although princesses such as Pocahontas and Mulan do not have the traditional ballgown, they are still in dresses. This suggests that 'the newer Disney Princesses, who usually are improvements in some ways over their predecessors, are redesigned to fit in with the line of princesses that came before them in the collection' ([Hains 2014](#): 178). This is applicable for both what the princesses are wearing within their branding (and therefore costume availability) but also in the types of products available. Hains specifically refers to the rebrand of Merida, who was heavily 'glamourised' during Disney Princess rebranding and various merchandising ([Hains 2014](#): 179–84).
- ⁶ Of course, some of this may be answered through fan-centred approaches such as fan-made and non-Disney licensed products that can be purchased via online markets such as Etsy or Redbubble.
- ⁷ This practice is certainly used during the film making process. Susan [Ohmer \(2006\)](#) comments in *George Gallup in Hollywood* that during the postwar era of film production, Walt Disney's main reason for hiring George Gallup (an expert in polling) was to assist with audience research. The studio believed that by using audience reactions in the earlier stages of production of films they could cut down on costs and identify any issues before the film progressed (208). [Ohmer \(2006\)](#) also noted 'According to Shamus Culhane, who worked at other animation studios before joining Disney, Walt Disney was one of the few cartoon producers who was willing to change a film based on audience response' (208).
- ⁸ This interview was conducted face-to-face and has therefore been transcribed word for word.
- ⁹ Something that was emphasized by Disney themselves when they launched the 'Dream Big Princess' campaign, which is discussed in the conclusion of this book.

Chapter 7

- ¹ Please see Sabrina [Mittermeier's \(2020\)](#) first and second chapters on Disneyland and Walt Disney World for an in-depth discussion of Disney's American theme parks.
- ² At Walt Disney World it is possible to meet: Snow White, Cinderella, Aurora, Ariel, Belle, Jasmine, Pocahontas, Mulan, Tiana, Merida, Anna, Elsa, and on special occasions: Moana. Disneyland Resort in California does not have official meeting slots for Pocahontas or Mulan – although they recently unveiled a princess dining experience that included Mulan, and Pocahontas will occasionally meet at The Royal Hall. However, these are

- not guaranteed character meets like there are at Walt Disney World. Eilonwy and Kida do not have meet and greet opportunities and are therefore not included in this chapter.
- ³ For an in-depth history of each Disney theme park, please see [Mittermeier \(2020\)](#).
 - ⁴ This includes: theme park admission; parks and experiences merchandise, food and beverage; resorts and vacations; merchandise licensing and retail; parks licensing, and other ([Disney 2019](#): 39). I am not including any statistics from 2020 onwards due to the impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on theme parks all over the world, which would remove some much-needed context around Disney's revenue.
 - ⁵ It is therefore imperative that the actors playing Disney characters, including the princesses do not 'break' character when greeting guests, which in more extreme cases could be a sackable offence (The Project on [Disney 1996](#): 136–7).
 - ⁶ Dining with the princesses is a way in which guests can guarantee to meet princesses without the long wait lines. Often, princess dining is a table service meal, which can cost anything from \$35 and above. The princesses are announced to the restaurant and make their way around each table and interact with guests. These experiences differ from park to park, with different princess themed restaurants to experience all over the world. Dining experiences are not included within the park ticket, and some meals can cost over \$100, however each restaurant I visited was always full, which indicates that these experiences are a popular way to meet the princesses. However, as it was not something every guest could do, I decided to focus on character meet and greets in my autoethnography.
 - ⁷ Cinderella, Aurora, Belle, and Tiana are in their ballgowns from the film (despite the fact they mostly spend more time in other outfits, or in Tiana's case her work uniform and then a frog). Snow White, Jasmine, Pocahontas, Mulan, Rapunzel, Merida, and Moana are dressed in their 'normal' outfits from their film. Ariel varies from her status as a mermaid and a ballgown. Finally, Anna is dressed in her travelling outfit rather than her ballgown, and Elsa is dressed in the blue gown she fashioned for herself rather than her Queen's robes. After *Frozen II* was released, Anna and Elsa were both in their Queens' robes.
 - ⁸ However, character experiences can vary based on the actress playing the princess. When I attended the Bon Voyage Adventure Breakfast (where you could meet Ariel and her prince, Eric, and Rapunzel and her prince, Flynn Rider), Ariel told me her favourite thing to do was 'kiss Prince Eric'. Therefore, depending on which actress ends up playing the princess, the responses will vary. Of course, this can work both ways – it can lead to a more empowered portrayal of the princess ([Hains 2015](#)), or, the actress can choose to portray a more 'accurate' (but perhaps less empowered) version of the princess.
 - ⁹ A fast pass photographer is a dedicated Walt Disney World photographer who takes pictures for guests that they can later purchase. They are often featured with characters to take photographs, especially the princesses.
 - ¹⁰ For an imperative Tribal Critical Race Theory approach to meeting with Pocahontas, please see [Lantz \(2019](#): 57–9).

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